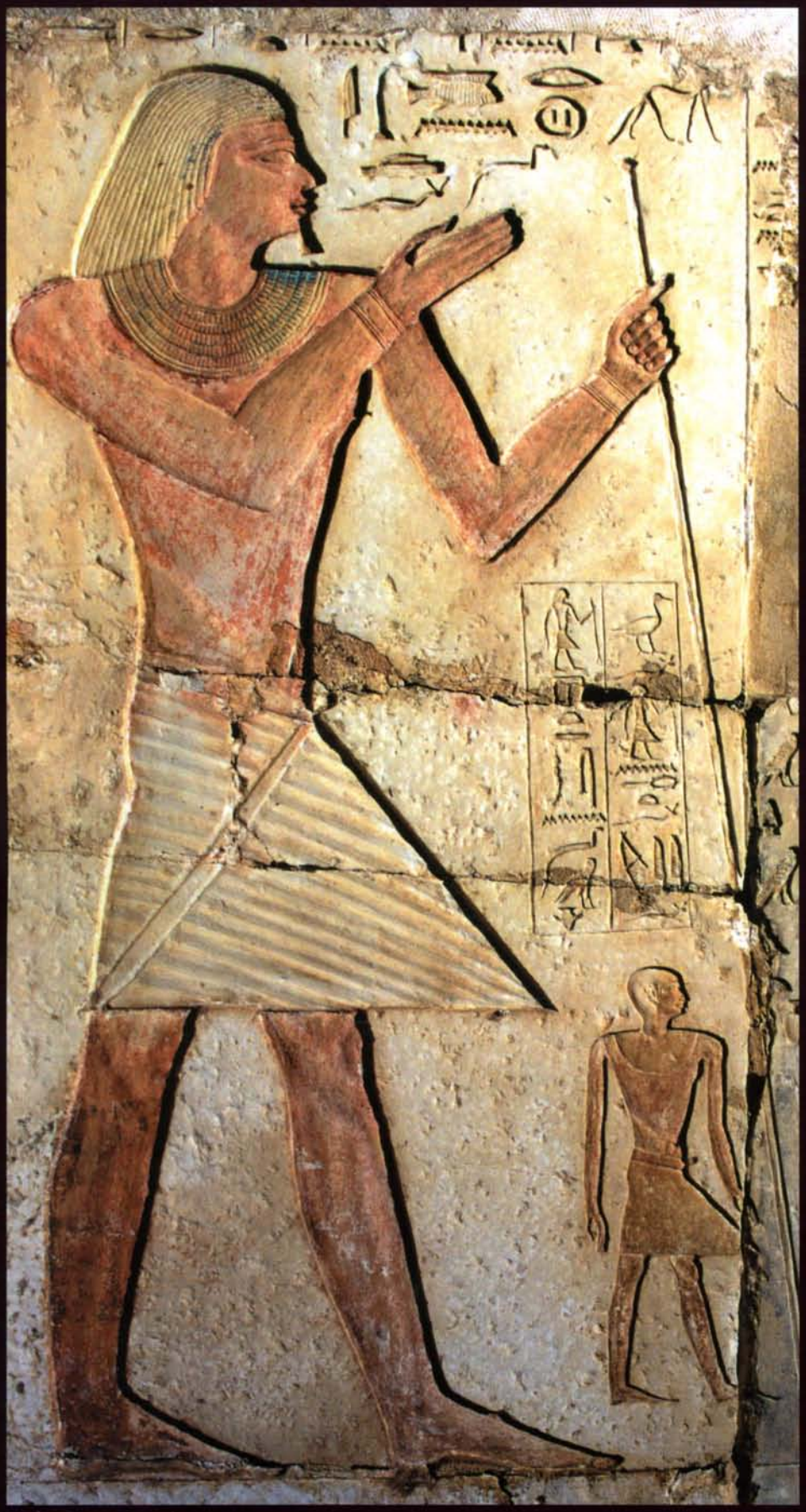
Memories of 4500 Years Ago



text MIROSLAV BÁRTA, photo KAMIL VODĚRA
preface MIROSLAV VERNER

In the long list of archaeological sites connected with Egypt's most ancient history, two stand out as particularly important: the area of Memphis and Saqqara, which lies at the frontier of Upper and Lower Egypt, and that of Thinis and Abydos in Upper Egypt. Thinis was the first residential city of the most ancient Egyptian kings, who were buried at Abydos. In the beginning of the First Dynasty, after the unification of Egypt, White Wall, the later Memphis (Mennefer) became the capital, and the kings gradually began to build their tombs in the nearby necropolis at Saqqara. The southern tip of the Czech archaeological concession in Abusir nearly touches the rocky cliff of North Saqqara, over which this archaic necropolis extends. Both cemeteries - in South Abusir and in North Saqqara - once lay on the western bank of a large natural basin, which was annually fed by the waters of the Nile flood. On the opposite bank of the basin lay the fortress and residence White Wall.

The cemetery at South Abusir thus presents Czech archaeologists with a unique opportunity to immediately partake on the exploration of the rise of the Egyptian civilisation and the gradual formation of the ancient pharaonic state. It is an extensive and glorious chapter of Egyptian history, a time of unprecedented economical and cultural boom, which was initiated by the unification of the country and which a few centuries later culminated in the building of pyramids, one of the wonders of the ancient world.

The exploration of South Abusir is, besides Dr. Břetislav Vachala, conducted by a team of young scholars led by Dr. Miroslav Bárta. In order for this ambitious project to succeed, a multidisciplinary approach is necessary, as well as the use of modern archaeological methods. The results of current, almost a decade running works are promising results and have so far fulfilled the expectations of the specialists. Already today, it is apparent that South Abusir contains spectacular tombs of high officials of the Archaic Period of the first two dynasties as well as from the subsequent dynasties of the Egyptian Old Kingdom.

The activity of Kamil Voděra, the specialist photographer of the Czech Institute of Egyptology of the Faculty of Arts, Charles University, is focused above all on the precise documentation of the archaeological works and the discovered objects. Nonetheless, his photographs capture also the atmosphere of the archaeological excavations in South Abusir, our Egyptian colleagues, with whom the Czech expedition has cooperated for many years, as well as the excited moments of discovery, and the unique finds, which the Abusir sand begins to reveal. The aim of the exhibition of Kamil Voděra's photographs is to present all these aspects to the general public.

Miroslav Verner

Miroslav Bárta

Memories of 4500 Years Ago

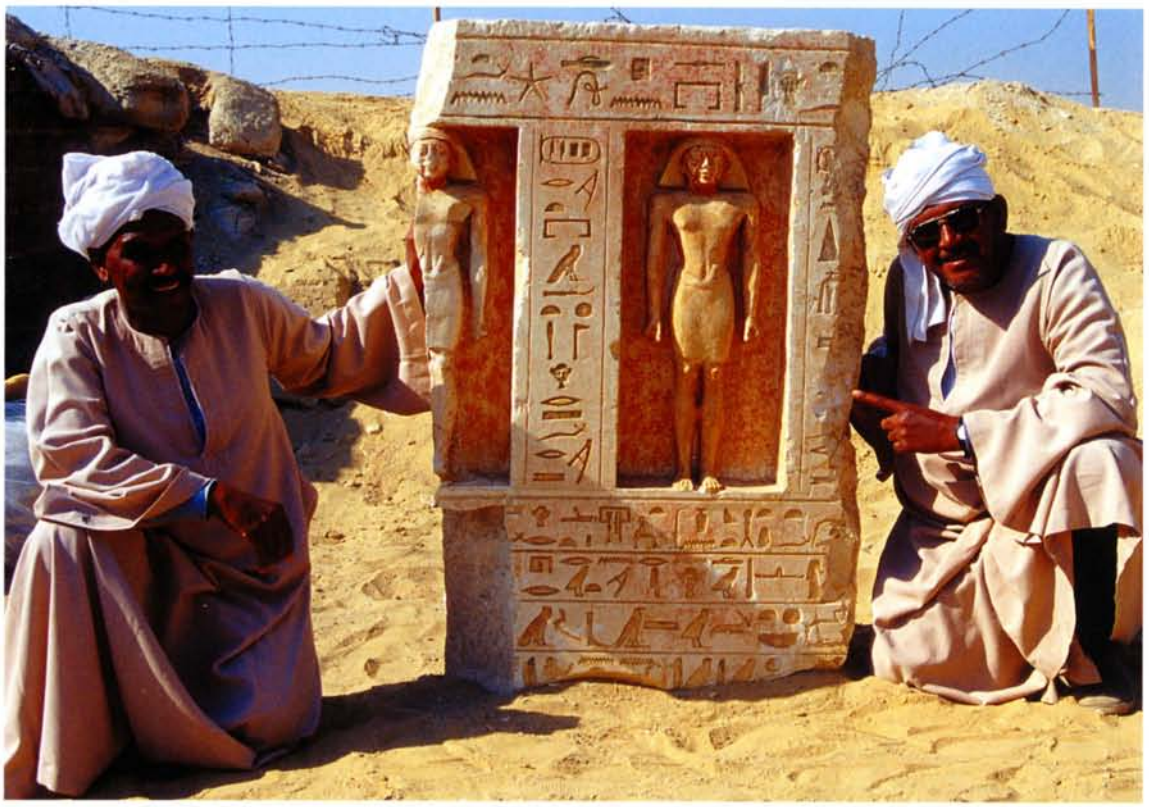
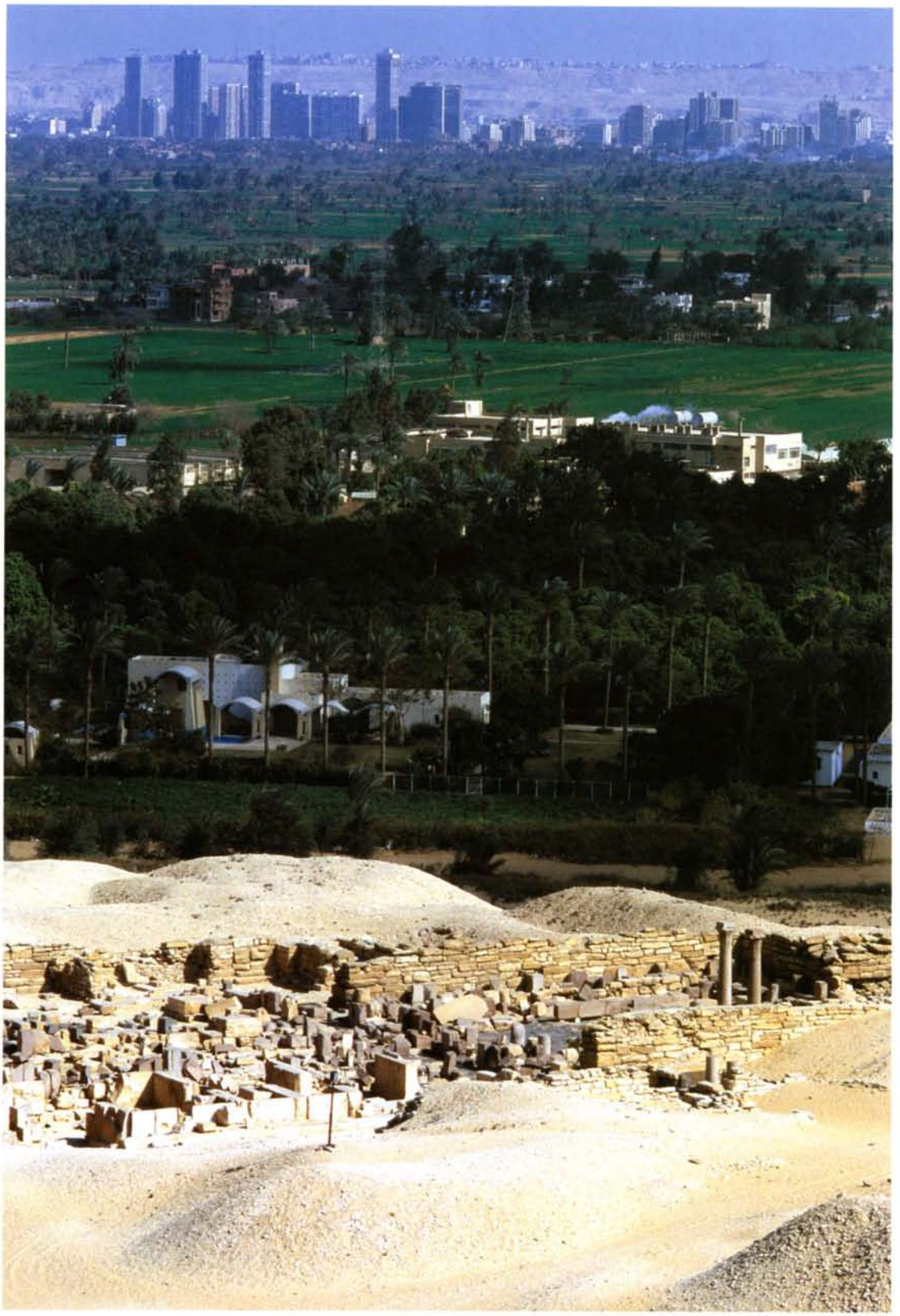


photo: Kamil Voděra



(Fig. 2)
An overview of four thousand years of history: the foreground shows the temple of Sahure, one of the most ancient buldings in Abusir. Behind is the Nile Valley, where life has remained unchanged for millenia. In the horizon we can see the skyscrapers of modern Cairo.

A Few Introductory Words

The Abusir necropolis was part of a stretch of ancient Egyptian necropoleis on the western bank of the Nile in the vicinity of the ancient Egyptian capital Memphis. The site extends over the area of several square kilometers and includes monuments from various periods of Pharaonic Egypt. Its development culminated in the time of the Fifth Dynasty (2494 - 2445 B.C.), when the pyramid complexes of kings Sahure, Neferirkare, Neferefre, Niuserre and perhaps even of the little known Shepseskare were built here. The exploration of the vast Abusir necropolis by the Czech Institute of Egyptology of the Faculty of Arts of Charles University was initiated in the year 1960, and since then, it constantly brings to light new sources and pieces of information about ancient Egyptian civilization.

The current exhibition is focused on the people whose tombs lay "in the shadow of the pyramids" of Old Kingdom kings (2650 - 2150 B.C.). The study of these tombs contributes immensely to our knowledge of the civilization on the Nile in the time of the pyramid builders, i.e. in the 3rd millennium B.C. In the course of the last decade, we were able to at least partially reconstruct the lives of several ancient Egyptian officials of both higher and lower ranks. The aim of this exhibition, called "Memories of 4500 years ago" is to illustrate the world of the ancient Egyptians by retelling the life stories of the dignitaries of the time of the pyramid builders.

Nowadays, when it is fortunately no longer possible to remove from Egypt the monuments of her glorious past, we base our interpretation of new archaeological excavations above all on field documentation, photographs, films, field notes and computer data. Some of these sources are presented and introduced in this exhibition. In drawing a picture of the ancient society, Egyptology cooperates with many other disciplines, such as archaeology, anthropology, conservation, geoinformatics and geophysics. And precisely the presence of a number of experts in various disciplines at every field project is one of the most interesting aspects of Egyptological work.

This exhibition could have never been realized without the significant help and contribution of all our colleagues from our Prague and Cairo research establishments. First and foremost, we owe deep gratitude to Professor Miroslav Verner, the field director of the works in Abusir. It was under his leadership that the exploration of South Abusir began in 1991. This work would not have been possible without the support of our alma mater, Charles University in Prague and the Faculty of Arts, the home institution of the Czech Institute of Egyptology. Finally, we would also like to thank the government of the Czech Republic, which had greatly contributed to the support and development of Czech Egyptology by constituting the Czech National Centre for Egyptology in the middle of the year 2000.

Miroslav Bárta
Kamil Voděra

Abusir in the Course of History

Abusir, one of the large cemeteries of the Old Kingdom Kings, the famous pyramid builders, is located approximately 30 km to the south of Cairo, on the western bank of the Nile at the very edge of the desert. To the east, the site is delimited by the fertile Nile valley, which swarms with life, to the west by the Libyan Desert which has since antiquity been a symbol of death and forgetfulness, the realm of the dead. The sharp transition between these two extremes is a kind of gate, a link between the world of the living and that of the dead. And precisely here, at this transitory site, Egyptian cemeteries were founded. In the time of the third millennium B.C., the Abusir necropolis was established here, too. A contemporary visitor may reach Abusir in about an hour's drive from the center of Cairo. Already along the way, he is confronted with evidence of the tight connection of ancient and modern Egypt. He passes the village of Bedrashein, the ancient Egyptian name of which, "Western settlement," refers to a no longer existing ancient habitation. Directly to the east of Abusir, less than a kilometer as the crow flies, there is now just the small village of Azazieh. According to oral tradition, it was here that Potiphar's wife unsuccessfully tried to seduce the Biblical Joseph and where he was later imprisoned on the base of a false charge.

The development of the wider Abusir necropolis was tied to the existence of the ancient capital of the unified Egypt, which was called the White Walls. According to tradition, the city was founded by the legendary King Menes toward the end of the fourth millennium B.C. Originally, there might have stood a fortress with white fortifications, which may have gradually developed into the Old Kingdom capital. It was the centre of the administration of the country, the site of the royal palace, it contained granaries and workshops and concentrated the highest officials of the country. Indirect evidence indicates that the city originally extended to the east of the rock massif of north Saqqara. To the west of this political center of the country, there was a concentration of most pyramids and tombs from the time of the Old Kingdom (the sites of Saqqara and Abusir), beginning with the tombs of the Second Dynasty Kings Raneb and Ninetjer and the Step Pyramid of King Djoser, and ending with the pyramid complexes of Kings Unas and Teti from the late Fifth and early Sixth Dynasties.

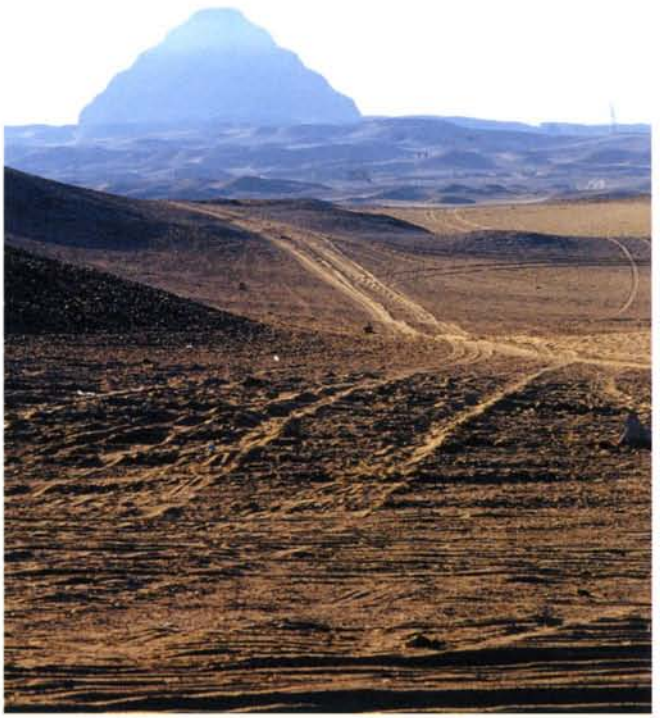
The evolution of the necropolis indirectly indicates that in the course of the third millennium B.C., the center of this large cemetery moved first northward (the existence of the Abusir necropolis in the Fifth Dynasty), and later, in the time of the Sixth Dynasty, to the south (the area of the so-called South Saqqara), where the complexes of several rulers were built in the course of the Sixth Dynasty. Another important circumstance influencing the foundation and development of the cemeteries was the existence of water basins, which probably extended along the eastern edge of the desert and provided the main access to the individual parts of the necropolis.

The archaeological history of Abusir begins in the time of the Second Dynasty. In the area to the northwest of Saqqara, an early dynastic cemetery was discovered by Hans Bonnet (1887-1972) in the beginning of the 20th century. In the 1980's, the Egyptian archaeologist Huleil Ghali excavated the the site. The tombs of this cemetery belonged to lesser officials and consisted of a burial chamber accessed by a descending stairway.

The next stage of development of the Abusir necropolis brought about mastaba tombs of the so-called transitional type. These monuments come from the end

Above:
(Fig. 3)
The Abusir pyramids, seen from the southeast; the pyramids of Giza can be seen in the background.
The palmgrove marks the original location of the ancient Lake of Abusir.

Right:
(Fig. 4)
The desert road leading to the Step Pyramid of King Djoser. Through this road, the Czech expedition leaves South Abusir every day.



of the Third and beginning of the Fourth Dynasty, and their characteristic feature is the presence of both a shaft leading to the burial chamber and a descending, usually winding, stairway.

The designation "mastaba tomb" is generally used to refer to stone or mud brick buildings, which have two parts, a superstructure (above ground) and a substructure (underground). The superstructure was of a rectangular ground plan, it was several meters high and had slightly inclined or vertical walls. It contained a decorated chapel, where the funerary cult of the deceased was performed. The most important component of the chapel was the so-called false door, which stood in the western wall of the room. It was a stone or wooden imitation of a true ancient Egyptian door, and according to the religious beliefs of the ancient Egyptians, the spirit of the deceased used it to enter the chapel in order to take part in the offering rituals organized in his honour, and to return back to the realm of the dead. The substructure was accessible via a shaft, at the bottom of which a short corridor led to the burial chamber, the final resting place of the tomb owner.

Among the most important of these tombs in south Abusir, the tomb of the official and priest Hetepi deserves mentioning. Hetepi was a confidant of the king who took care of his affairs, and he was also a priest of the goddesses Bastet and Hatmehit. His tomb is important above all due to its decoration, which is concentrated on the eastern façade of the chapel, while the inner walls of the chapel were left undecorated. The tomb of Hetepi is contemporary with the tomb of the overseer of the granaries of the royal palace Iti, as well as with the tombs that flank the bank of the Lake of Abusir. The owners of the latter tombs remain, however, virtually unknown.

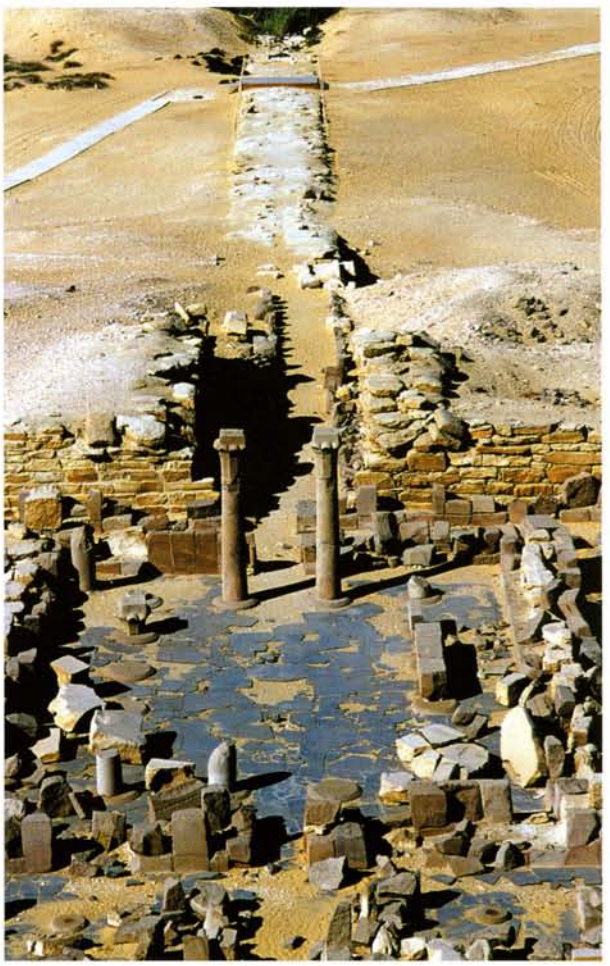
The rise of the Fourth Dynasty brought with it several decades of a standstill, when all building works were transferred to Giza. The activity at Abusir was revived first in the beginning of the Fifth Dynasty. The first of the new tomb builders was the official Kaaper, a priest, scribe and army general, and the overseer of all king's works. The importance of his tomb lies above all in the fact that it is the first hitherto known evidence of building activities at this site after the Fourth Dynasty. Since the workshops and building guilds of Saqqara had after a long period of inactivity lost continuity, Kaaper brought with him the architectural tradition of Giza. Thus, in terms of architecture, his tomb represents a typical Giza tomb from the second half of the Fourth Dynasty.

The beginning of the Fifth Dynasty witnessed also the foundation of the royal necropolis of Abusir by King Sahure, the second ruler of the Fifth Dynasty, who reigned for 12 -13 years. His pyramid complex is the best preserved and most illustrative example of the setup of such buildings in the time of the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties.

The entrance to the complex was formed by the valley temple, which was accessible from the east and south, where the so-called Lake of Abusir may have been located. An ascending causeway connected the valley temple with the pyramid temple. The causeway was originally roofed and its walls were decorated with mythological and court scenes, dominated by the Egyptian king. The preserved reliefs include numerous representations of the ruler, the bringing of foreign captives, hungry Bedouin, dancing scenes, sea boat journeys, scenes connected with the construction of the pyramid complex, and many others.

The pyramid temple itself was entered via a monumental granite gate, which

Above:
(Fig. 5)
The Abusir necropolis with the pyramid and funerary temple of King Neferefre (right) and Queen Khentkaus II (left). The pyramids of Saqqara and Dahshur are discernible in the badgound.



Below:
(Fig. 6)
The funerary temple of Sahure and its ascending causeway, seen from the top of the pyramid.

led to the so-called House of the Great. Its name derives from the fact that the high officials of the country assembled here in order to part with their deceased ruler. This room opened into the corridor running around the columned court and to the court itself. The court was paved with basalt blocks and its roof was supported by altogether sixteen red granite columns with palmiform capitals. The black colour of the floor symbolized the resurrection of the king, evoking the way all life in Egypt rose from the fertile layers of black Nile mud. The door at the back led to the so-called transversal corridor, which divided the outer and inner parts of the pyramid temple.

The inner temple consisted of a room with five niches, which originally contained five statues of the king. The sides of the room contained doorways leading to the northern and southern magazines, where the cultic equipment and offerings for the daily cult of the king were stored. In the westernmost part of the temple, at the very foot of the pyramid, was the chapel, the offering hall of the temple, where priests presented offerings to the spirit of the deceased king. The east-west oriented chapel had an alabaster floor, dado of red granite and walls of limestone blocks covered with relief decoration. The western wall contained the so-called false door, through which the spirit of the king returned from the other world in order to partake on the offering rituals performed in the chapel. The false door was of red granite covered with copper or gold foil. In the southwestern corner of the room was a small niche with a purification basin.

The side of the base of the pyramid of Sahure measured 78 m, and the pyramid itself reached the height of 48 m. The core of the pyramid was originally built in six steps, of which now only five are discernible. The entrance to the pyramid's substructure was situated at the foot of its northern side, slightly to the east of the north-south axis of the pyramid. A descending corridor opened into a vestibule, which was located directly under the apex of the pyramid. Further west lay the east-west oriented burial chamber with a triple gabled ceiling built of large limestone blocks in order to distribute the weight of the building. The burial chamber may have originally contained a basalt sarcophagus.

The next pyramid builder at Abusir was king Neferirkare, who may have been Sahure's brother. His pyramid was in the first building stage conceived as a six-stepped one with a base of 72 m. Later, the core was extended to eight steps, the walls were cased smooth and a true pyramid was created. Its side measured 104 m, and its height reached 52 m, which made it the greatest pyramid on the Saqqara necropolis. The substructure of the pyramid of Neferirkare was, just like the other elements of his complex, very similar to those of Sahure.

The pyramid temple of Neferirkare was built in several construction stages and it was finished first after the king's death. It is also the place of origin of one of the most significant corpora of epigraphic material from the time of the Old Kingdom, the Abusir papyrus archive, which is our major source of information concerning the function of the temple complexes and the royal cult in this period. The ascending causeway of the complex remained unfinished due to the premature death of the king, and it was later reused by his younger son Niuserre.

Neferirkare's wife was Queen Khentkaus II, whose burial place is located to the south of the pyramid of her husband. Her pyramid was probably built in three steps, and a small pyramid temple adjoined its eastern side. Neferirkare's reign was probably directly followed by the short reign of the relatively unknown King Shepseskare. His

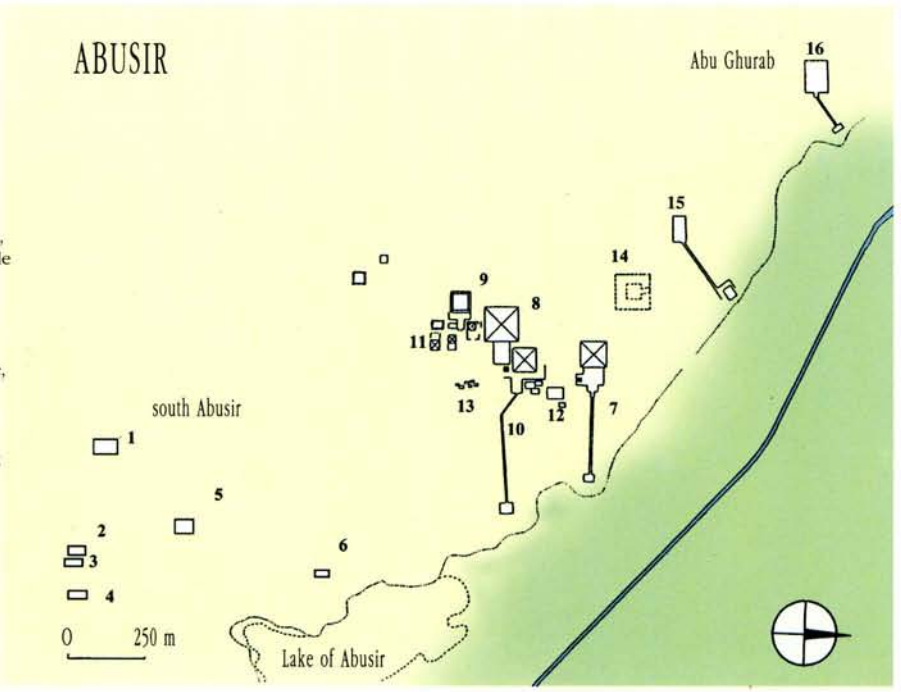
pyramid complex, the construction of which had hardly started, is commonly placed to the area between the pyramid of Sahure and the sun temple of Userkaf at Abu Ghurab.

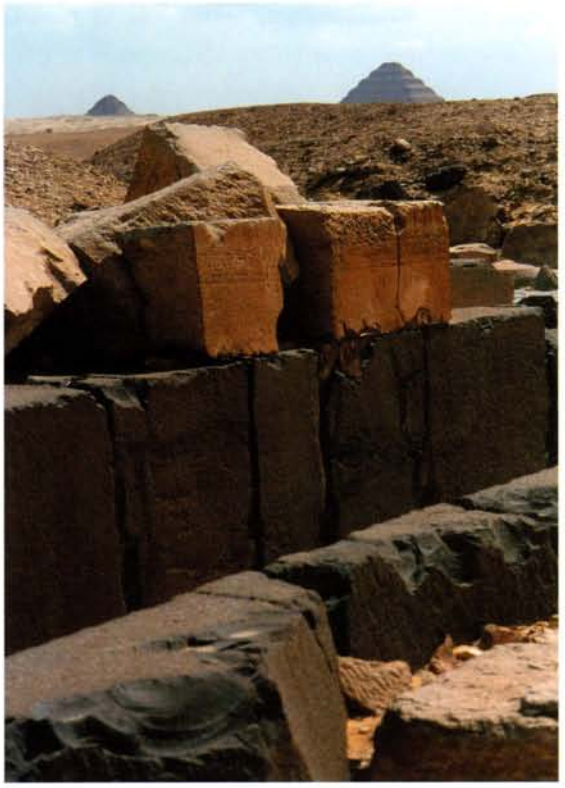
After Shepsekare, Neferirkare's older son Neferefre ascended to the throne, although he too reigned only for a very short time, perhaps for approximately two years. His pyramid had sides of 65.5 m and it must also have been originally planned as a step pyramid. Due to the early death of the king, the overall conception of the tomb had to be changed and instead of a pyramid, a mastaba-like structure was built, called iat, hill, by the Egyptians. During the life of the king, his architect managed to finish only the basic components of the pyramid's substructure - the descending corridor followed by a horizontal corridor leading to the vestibule, which opened to the east - west oriented burial chamber. Neferefre's sarcophagus was made of red granite and during the excavation of his burial chamber, remains of the mummy of the king were discovered, as well as fragments of his funerary equipment. Similarly, only a small part of the pyramid temple was built during the king's lifetime. This small original part is built of stone and stands directly at the foot of the pyramid, the rest was quickly built of mud bricks after Neferefre's death. The ascending causeway and valley temple are missing. Unique, however, was the discovery of the slaughterhouse complex, where the animals sacrificed in the temple were slaughtered, at the southeastern corner of the temple.

The true heyday of the necropolis may be dated to the time of King Niuserre, the younger son of Neferirkare and brother of Neferefre. This king was the last one to have built his funerary complex in Abusir. Besides that, he also arranged the completion of the complexes of his mother Khentkaus II, his father Neferirkare and his brother Neferefre. The time of Niuserre's reign also witnessed an unprecedented rise of the power of men of non-royal origin. One of them was Ptahshepses, who was the first person outside the royal family to have the right to marry a royal daughter - princess Khamerernebti.

Map of the Abusir necropolis
(Fig. 7)

1 - the complex of Qar,
2 - the tomb of Kaaper,
3 - the tomb of Iti,
4 - the tomb of Hetepi,
5 - Fetekti's cemetery,
6 - Lake Abusir tombs,
7 - the pyramid complex of Sahure,
8 - the pyramid and funerary temple of Neferirkare,
9 - the complex of Neferefre,
10 - the complex of Niuserre,
11 - the pyramids and mastaba tombs of the family of Niuserre,
12 - the mastaba of Ptahshepses,
13 - the mastabas of the family of King Djedkare Isesi,
14 - the unfinished pyramid of King Shepseskare,
15 - the sun temple of Userkaf,
16 - the sun temple of Niuserre





Above:
(Fig. 8)
The façade of the mastaba of Ptahshepses with the pyramid of Sahure in the background.
On the horizon are the pyramids of Giza, the rightmost of them is the largest Egyptian pyramid, that of King Khufu.

Left:
(Fig. 9)
Detail of the basalt casing of the temple of Niuserre. The step pyramid of Djoser can be seen in the background.

Right:
(Fig. 10)
The ascending causeway of King Niuserre with a basin for the collection of rainwater. Water was conducted out of the temple through an intricate underground drainage system, because it was considered impure.

The building stages of the Ptahsepses mastaba, which is located to the north-east of the pyramid of Niuserre, map the gradual rise of this high official, who started his career as a simple royal hairdresser and finally was appointed to the office of vizier.

After the death of Niuserre, the center of the development of the Abusir necropolis moved back to its southernmost part, which is closely connected with the development of central and north Saqqara. One of the oldest and most interesting tombs in this part of the necropolis is the tomb of the official and priest Fetekti, which was partially explored already by the expedition of Lepsius. This tomb became famous above all due to its decoration painted on plaster. Its chief motifs included market scenes and transport of textiles, in both cases, the fine, detailed execution makes these scenes rank among the most important ones of the Old Kingdom.

This tomb became the center of a whole necropolis of officials and priests who were employed in the pyramid complexes of Fifth Dynasty rulers. The youngest building from the time of the Old Kingdom in the area of South Abusir is the tomb complex of the vizier Qar and his family. Qar began building his tomb in the western part of the necropolis already while he was still a judge at the royal court. Later, when he was unexpectedly promoted to the rank of vizier, such a final resting place was no longer adequate for him, and he had to extend it. The final building thus has two offering chapels and a further, so-called corridor chapel for the cult of other members of his family. In its immediate vicinity, other tombs of the sons of Qar were constructed. The most famous one was situated to the south of the tomb of Qar and belonged to his favourite son Inti. The tombs of other sons of Qar were found to the north of the tomb of the founder of this family: the chapels and burial chambers of Qar junior and Senedjemib were found; so far, we have not discovered the tomb of Qar's last son, Tjenti.

Now, after only ten years of archaeological exploration of south Abusir, we were able to get an insight into the lives of some officials of the time of the Old Kingdom, whose lifetimes date to the period of more than 4000 years ago.

Priest Hetepi, the Oldest Known Face from Abusir

The tomb of priest Hetepi was excavated in the year 2000, and represents the oldest of the tombs hitherto discovered on the Czech archaeological concession. It dates to the beginning of the Fourth Dynasty (ca. 2600 B.C.) and is located only a few hundred meters to the north of the ancient Step Pyramid complex of King Djoser.

The building of the stone pyramid complex of King Djoser is one of the highest achievements of the ancient Egyptians. The architect who was responsibile for its creation was the high priest of Heliopolis and king's builder Imhotep. Already in ancient times, several hundred years after the completion of the monument, numerous people visited the site in order to see it, and left behind them inscriptions expressing their admiration of the beauty and splendour of the place.

Djoser's complex symbolized an eternal palace. This was the place where the deceased and deified king met with other gods of the Egyptian pantheon. The divine nature of the ruler is indicated also by the form of one of his names, Netjerikhet, Divine of Body. The complex itself was called The refreshment of gods. Numerous religious festivals were celebrated here, and the highest officials and priests of the country may even have gathered here in order to honour the deceased ruler. But this unique creation of the human genius also remains a great mystery. It consists of a number of many independent and separate architectural elements that reflect the consolidation of the political and economic situation in Egypt. At the same time they served as symbolical places for the celebration of religious festivals; among them were buildings that commemorated the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt, a temple dedicated to the mortuary cult of the king, an altar on which offerings were presented to the sun god, and many others. The complex is so vast that an extensive area within it still remains unexplored.

The final resting place of the king was constructed in the form of a step pyramid, with the burial chamber hidden deep in its substructure. The burial chamber itself was surrounded by a complex system of decorated rooms and corridors, which are now considered to represent a model of Djoser's earthly palace, built as his dwelling in the other world.

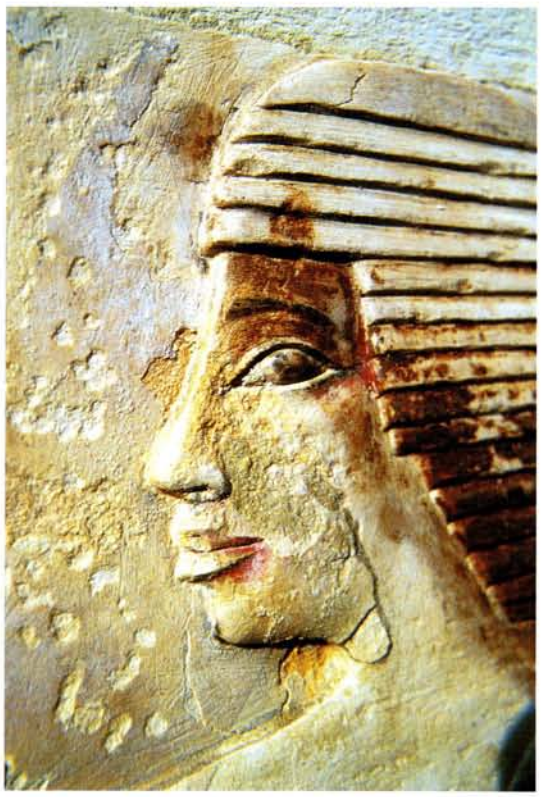
Our knowledge of the time of King Djoser remains fragmentary. Over 4500 years have passed since then, and most of the monuments were destroyed and disappeared without trace. We do not even know the site of the final resting place of the ingenious builder of the Step Pyramid, Djoser's high official, architect, and later also patron of physicians, Imhotep, whose fame and for ages recounted wisdom have survived the fall of ancient Egypt to last virtually until today.

Among the latest discoveries from the time near that of the builder of the first pyramid, the tomb of Hetepi dating ca. to 2600 B.C., clearly stands out, revealing the way Hetepi imagined and secured his afterlife.

The tomb of Hetepi began to emerge out of the sand of the Egyptian desert already during the first hours of the excavation works. It turned out that the crowns of its walls were hidden only several centimeters under the desert surface. Shortly after the excavation began, it became clear that already in terms of its size, the tomb is exceptional and belongs to the largest contemporary buildings of its kind (it covered the surface of 1000 m^2). The architecture of this mastaba-type tomb was at places preserved up to the height of 2,5 m, i.e. almost to its original height, which may have reached 3 m. In less than a week of archaeological excavations, it was possible to not

only unearth almost the entire rectangular ground plan of the tomb, which was built of mud brick and limestone debris (its longer side measured almost 50 m), but also its eastern facade and even its cultic chapel, where the offering rituals for the spirit of the deceased Hetepi were performed.

The discovery of this chapel, which was built of fine white limestone blocks, surprised the excavators in many ways: its eastern face was covered with a unique relief decoration. The tomb of Hetepi thus belongs to the oldest decorated tombs in Egypt and confirms the hypothesis that tomb decoration had first concentrated in the entrance area and only later was transferred to interior chapel walls. The northern part of the face of the chapel shows Hetepi seated at an offering table covered with sliced bread. More offerings are depicted around the table; these were to be regularly offered to the deceased in his chapel. The space above his head includes his titles, inscribed in two lines, which mediate to us the character of this man, who lived four thousand years ago. In order to understand these titles, it was first necessary to spend several months working on their translation. The process was, moreover, complicated by the fact that we are dealing with one of the very ancient texts which abound in abbreviations. In the beginning, it was necessary to carefully choose which of the several possible interpretations of the individual hieroglyphic signs and their combinations was correct. Only then we could proceed to explain the individual titles, some of which remain without parallels. Among Hetepi's main titles, we find the "king's herold with a strong voice, great one of the ten(s) of Upper (southern) Egypt and overseer of the slaughterhouse." Further, Hetepi exercised several priestly functions and he was also an *iry ikhet nesut*, i.e. "property custodian of the king." This title indicates that Hetepi belonged to the highest official elite, which we could perhaps compare to the suite of the Mediaeval king. These officials worked not just as personal servants of the king, who watched over his hygiene, diet and dressing, but they also formed the backbone of the nascent ancient Egyptian state.



(Fig. 11)
Portrait of Hetepi with traces of original polychromy

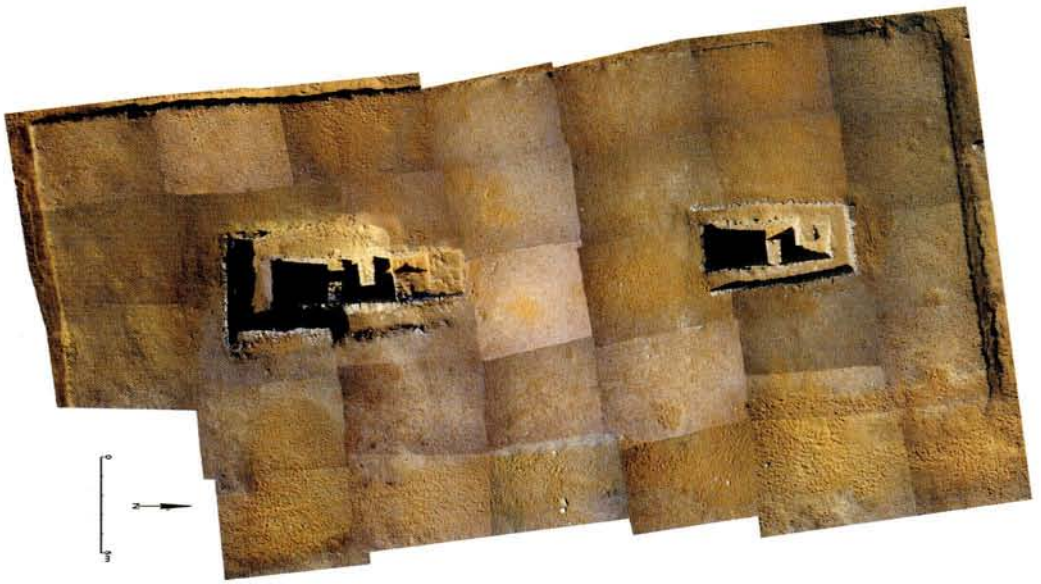
To the south of the entrance to the chapel, the figure of Hetepi was merely traced in black ink. Apparently no time remained to finish the decoration, and thus a simple rough artist's sketch was preserved, including the ancillary numbers that give the proportions of the individual parts of the human body. Hetepi is represented standing, leaning on his official staff, the attribute of his power and authority. In front of him, we see two of his sons. The chapel itself was undecorated and three of its walls were cased with small limestone blocks, while the fourth, western wall, must have been already in antiquity destroyed by robbers. However, stone pivots were preserved in the limestone floor, attesting the existence of a double-winged door, which had once closed the western part of the chapel. In all likelihood, the door originally protected a niche, which may have contained a striding figure of Hetepi.

The unique character of the chapel lies above all in the fact that it vividly illustrates the initial stages of the development of the ancient Egyptian conceptions of the existence in the hereafter. Together with the double-winged door, the niche represented a magical gate connecting the world of the living with that of the dead. Beyond this frontier lay the other world, from which the spirit of Hetepi returned to partake in daily rituals.

The chapel was the place of the performance of funerary ceremonies, the aim of which was to communicate with the deceased and to equip of his spirit with symbolical offerings. The building of a tomb was one of the basic prerogatives of the afterlife existence of the ancient Egyptians. Thus, one of the earliest preserved instructions from the time of the Old Kingdom says: "Build yourself a house in the necropolis and embellish your place in the west. Remember that death is nothing for us, remember that we value life; but the house of death is precisely for life!"

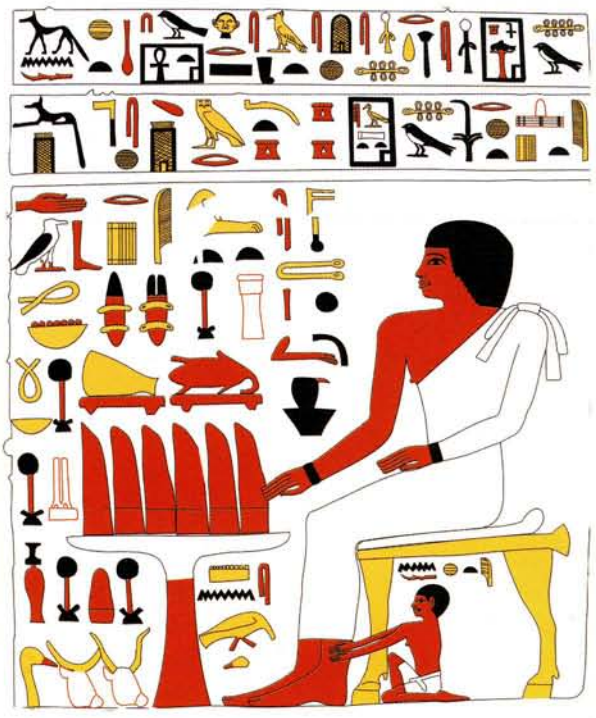
Hetepi's burial chamber was hidden at the bottom of a deep shaft and was accessed from the north by a unique winding stairway. At the bottom of the shaft a short, almost two meters high corridor led south to the burial chamber, which was, however, plundered already in antiquity. Only several fragments of a wooden coffin remain from the original burial, together with pieces of funerary equipment, which was also considered indispensable for an undisturbed afterlife existence. Based on parallel examples, we know that at this time funerary equipment consisted of food and drinks for the spirit of the tomb owner, of stone and pottery vessels, boxes, clothes, accessories and other items to which the Egyptians were well accustomed from their daily lives. The deceased thus had at his disposal everything that he could potentially use in his new, eternal life.

Currently, intensive excavation works are in progress around the tomb of Hetepi and further important discoveries are expected in near future. And who knows, perhaps the nearby sand hides even the legendary tomb of Imhotep, the discovery of which was and still remains a dream of several generations of Egyptologists.



Above:
The northern part of the façade of the chapel of Hetepi with an offering scene, depicting Hetepi seated behind an offering table laden with bread. Other offerings are around the table.

Below:
A computerized reconstruction of the same panel, as it might have looked in the time of its creation. The coulour palette of that time included four basic colours: black, white, red, and yellow.
(P. Vlčková)



Left:
A bird's eye view of the tomb of Hetepi.
(P. Čech)

Kaaper, an Egyptian Frontier Guard

Already in antiquity, ancient Egyptian monuments were the focus of great attention. This interest was only natural, since Egyptian cemeteries contained numerous treasures, such as above all luxury stone vessels, wooden furniture, items of personal adornement, jewels, amulets and objects of daily use, which ensured a satisfied life for the deceased in the hereafter. First came robbers, looters of the burial chambers, who were able to rob even the most carefully watched places of the tomb, often with the help of the necropolis guards, sometimes even only several days after the burial. In times of unrest and interregnum, tombs became easily accessible sources of wealth and were looted again. At all times of Egyptian history, but above all in the New Kingdom, pyramids and tombs were dismantled as cheap sources of building material. In this respect, the building activities and projects of Ramesses II represent one of the greatest disasters. But the Romans showed no more respect for the ancient structures. In the Arab period, ancient Egyptian monuments and above all pyramids once again became the focus of attention of the Egyptian rulers, who strived to extract from them the greatest possible amount of gold and legendary treasures. These activities reached their peak in the time of the reign of Muhammad Ali (19th century), who used to give Egyptian monuments to European monarchs and important official visitors of the state in order to buy their favour. Thus now, after almost 4000 years of incessant destruction of the buildings, Egyptologists are facing an extremely complicated situation, and must make use of all available sources during their research. Even thus, it is not certain that an optimal state of knowledge will ever be reached. Nonetheless, it is sometimes possible to fight this adversity of fortune and history with success.

The tomb of the army commmander and official Kaaper is an illustrative example of these problems. The reconstructed history of the tomb of Kaaper shows that only during the last 100 years, this monument was discovered and lost several times. Its fate began to be sealed in the beginning of the 20th century, when it first became the target of tomb robbers. They dragged several large limestone blocks out of the cultic chapel. Most of these blocks, which were decorated with fine reliefs, found their way to the museums in the U.S.A. For the second time, it was "discovered" in 1959, when the American egyptologist Henry G. Fischer published a study dealing with the personality and titulary of Kaaper, based on several photographs taken in a tomb lying "somewhere on the Saqqara necropolis." For the third time, the tomb was finally discovered in 1989 by our Egyptian colleagues, who had to interfere with the ravages of modern tomb robbers. Several more limestone blocks with relief decoration could still be saved from the extensively damaged chapel. The exploration of the tomb of Kaaper was the first project of Czech Egyptologists in the area of South Abusir, and its results brought a lot of new and surprising information.

The tomb itself is built of quality Tura limestone from the quarries located on the eastern bank of the Nile to the south of Cairo. The length of the tomb of Kaaper reaches almost 42 m in the north-south direction, its width is 20 m and its original height must have reached 5 m. The southeastern part of the tomb included a small chapel with an L-shaped ground plan. Its decoration was, as stated above, extensively damaged in the past and therefore, its theoretical reconstruction presented one of the most important tasks to be solved.

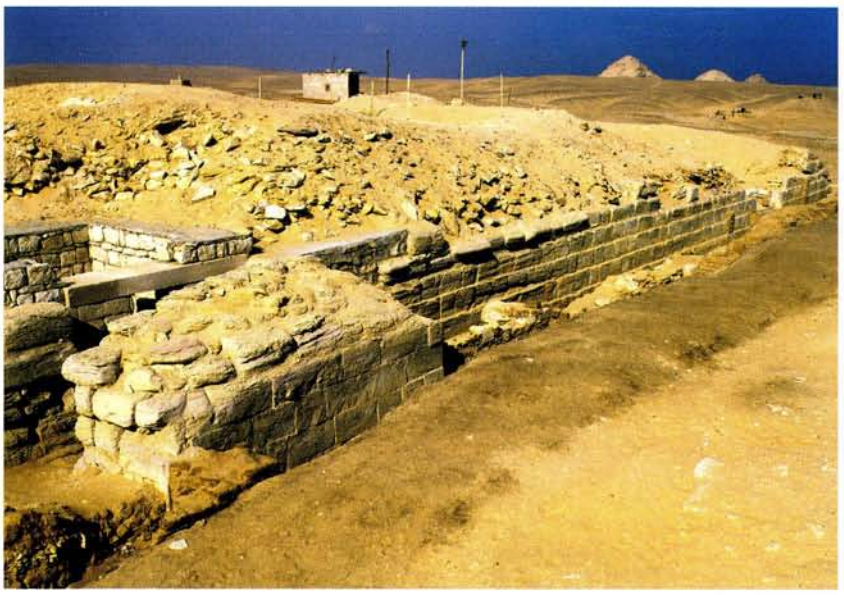
The work on the reconstruction of the original appearance of the interior decoration of the tomb lasted several years. On the eastern wall of the chapel, over

the entrance, there was originally a scene with fishermen drawing a large towing net equipped with floats. Their catch includes various fish, which are represented with such fine details, that even now it is possible to precisely determine the individual species. A photograph of this part of the decoration taken in 1959 shows more or less the entire scene. Compared to it, the block which is now kept in the Metropolitan Museum in New York is very incomplete. Where is the rest? We can only hypothesize that it found its way to some private collection.

The entire remaining portion of the eastern wall was covered with a typical offering scene showing Kaaper with his wife Tjenteti seated behind an offering table laden with sliced bread and other offerings. This part of the chapel decoration was the only one left untouched by robbers, since it was highly damaged by crystalline salts.

The north wall was originally covered with the representation of a large standing figure of the tomb owner, with his wife lovingly embracing him around his shoulders. This part of decoration, too, is forever lost, and the last photographs of it appeared in the publication from 1959. Already then, however, the faces of both figures were lost - probably because they had been detached and sold on the Egyptian antiquities market. Over the heads of the married couple, there was a damaged hieroglyphic inscription, which coud be partially reconstructed. In it, Kaaper addresses future visitors of the tomb: "I have built this tomb, I am justified before the god. I have built this tomb from my own property... I never said anything wrong against anyone, I never stole anything from anyone... Whoever would want to disturb this tomb will be judged by the Great God, lord of the (last) judgement; the king's official, Kaaper."

This type of text is known among Egyptologists as "negative confession". The chief aim of this composition was to persuade the visitors that the tomb owner had lived in compliance with the ethical norms of his time and that he deserved regular offerings and prayers in his chapel to secure for him an undisturbed afterlife existence. The inscription also shows us the typical transgressions of the time of the pyramid builders: Egyptian officials were dismantling older tombs in order to acquire building stone for their own tombs, calumny and gossip were no exception at the court, and often, officials who had enough executive authority would misuse their power for their own enrichment.



(Fig. 15)
The mastaba of Kaaper, seen from the southeast. In the foreground its completely destroyed chapel with a protective wall.

The gradual reconstruction of the decoration of the western wall illustrates how much the work of an Egyptologist may resemble detective investigation. While assembling this formerly almost completely dismembered wall, it became clear that the

individual decorated limestone blocks are now kept on at least three continents. The central point of the decoration of the wall was the false door, through which the deceased would pass to this world from the western realm of the dead in the course of offering rituals. Approximately in the middle of the door was an opening leading to a completely closed room, which originally contained an idealized stone statue of the deceased Kaaper (these closed inaccessible rooms are called serdabs). The decoration of the upper part of the false door consists of a panel with a figure of Kaaper seated behind a table with offering loaves. The hieroglyphic inscriptions around him mention more offerings, including, besides food and drink, also various luxury commodities. The favourite items ranged over incense, natron, imported cosmetic oils, black and green pigments used as eyepaint, dates, figs, grapes, wine, assorted cakes and drinks including various types of bread, cakes and beer, to stone vessels and textiles. The panel is now located in the Detroit Institute of Arts.

Over the panel, there was originally a lintel bearing more titles and the name of Kaaper. To our great surprise, this lintel was discovered first in 1994, lying in drift sand about 500 m to the south of the tomb. Buried by the thieves and ready for subsequent transport, it was found by our Scotch colleagues. The method and quality of the artist's work, the preserved titles as well as the dimensions of the block enabled its easy identification and placement on its original spot in the tomb, such as is shown by the computer reconstruction of the wall.

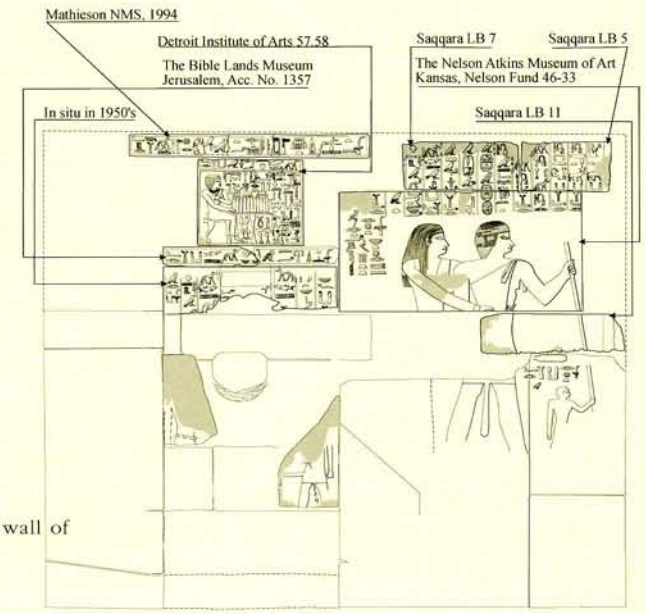
To the right of the false door, Kaaper was depicted standing, accompanied by his wife and their son, who was also named Kaaper, like his father. A larger part of this scene is today located in the Nelson Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas. Several columns of hierloglyphic inscriptions over the heads of the married couple record over thirty of Kaaper's titles and offices at the Egyptian court. However, these blocks are no longer in the tomb, they are now located in the magazines of the Saqqara inspectorate. Had our Egyptian colleagues not reacted in time in 1989, even these beautiful incriptions would now undoubtedly be part of some private property.

Below:
(Fig. 16)
The interior of the chapel with a granite libation basin in front of the completely destroyed false door.

Right:
(Fig. 17)
Reconstruction of the west wall of the chapel

The inscriptions from the tomb of the official Kaaper are very interesting and important, since they offer us a detailed descripton of Kaaper's official career. His titles included those of a "herdsman of the dappled cattle, scribe of the pasture lands of the dappled cattle, scribe of the department of documents, overseer of the scribes of the department of documents, scribe of the king's army in the fortresses of Serer, Tepa, Ida, in the area of the Terraces of Turquoise and in the foreign lands behind the eastern and western border ... priest of the goddess Heqet, army general and overseer of all royal works."

These titles tell us that Kaaper belonged to the highest officials of his time. It is also important to note that in that period, military, priestly and official functions were not strictly separated and one person could perform all three types of activities. For some time, Kaaper's career developed outside the capital; he served as a scribe of the royal documents in several frontier areas and he was responsible for the



(Fig. 16)
Reconstruction
of the western wall of
the chapel
(P.Vlčková)

Egyptian expeditions to the Sinai Peninsula, namely to the area of Serabit el-Khadim and Wadi Maghara, where the Egyptians mined turquoise, a higly valued mineral of blue-green colour. Later, Kaaper became the chief royal architect, responsible for royal buildings on Egyptian territory. At the same time, he was also a member of the funerary brotherhood, which organised funerary processions to the tombs in south Abusir and Saqqara.

The analysis of his titles is of some importance also for the study of the period of the Old Testament Patriarchs. Kaaper lived in the immediately preceding time (the Patriarchs are now commonly dated to the 22nd century B.C.). Some of his titles make it clear that he was responsible for watching over the Egyptian frontier and over the pasture lands of the dappled cattle. Other sources attest that dappled cattle was typical above all for Asiatic nomadic tribes. Also, the Old Testament mentions that in times of draught, Abraham and his tribe and herds had to find refuge in Egypt, namely the Egyptian Delta, which at that time abounded in large pastures.

"Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine was severe." (Gen. 12, 10)

The historical context makes it clear that already in the time of the Old Kingdom, various nomadic tribes from the Near East and the Sinai penetrated to Egypt, where pastures were reserved for their herds. However, this could happen only with the consent of the Egyptian frontier police, of which Kaaper was a member. The discovery and interpretation of his tomb thus shed further light on the relationships of Egypt and Syria-Palestine in the time of the patriarchs. The two imported wine amphorae found in Kaaper's burial chamber justify our belief that this official played an important role in an area which functioned as a melting pot of several cultures and religions.

The only thing to regret in connection with Kaaper is the fact that his burial chamber, hidden at the bottom of a 24 m deep shaft, was looted already in antiquity and destroyed to such an extent, that it was not possible to explore it for security reasons. Anyway, we might say that we were able, at least in part, to recover the life story of this undoubtedly interesting official from the dark areas of history.

Fetekti -a Priest from Abusir

The mastaba of the official and priest Fetekti dates to the end of the Fifth Dynasty and belongs to the numerous ancient Egyptian tombs with a very sad fate. It was first excavated by the German Egyptologist Karl Richard Lepsius between 1842-1843, in the course of his survey of the pyramid fields at Abusir and Saqqara. Lepsius limited his works to the excavation of the open court, which formed the entrance part of the tomb, and to the recording of its decoration. In the middle of the 19th century, the walls of the court still bore a large number of scenes painted on white plaster, which showed various aspects of the daily life of the ancient Egyptians. This decoration included scenes of assembling and transport of funerary equipment, wine making, scenes showing carpenters, wild game hunt in the desert, boat journeys, and, last but not least, the ancient Egyptian market.

The tomb of Fetekti was built in a remote area of the Abusir necropolis, on the slope of a small valley, which gradually descends from the Egyptian western desert plateau to the east, toward the Nile. This valley thus formed a natural course for the water which accumulated on the desert plateaus at the times of annual torrential rains and flew down to the Nile valley. Its destructive power inflicted substantial damage on a large part of the necropolis where the spirit of Fetekti dwelled.

This cemetery was built towards the end of the Fifth Dynasty as the final resting place of several families of priests who served in royal funerary temples and at the king's court. Gradually, a complex of mud brick tombs developed here. Each tomb consisted of a large open court and a cultic chapel in the form of a narrow corridor. The western wall of the chapel contained one or more false doors. To the west of the chapel, the mouths of several burial shafts led to the burial chambers located in the substructure of the tomb. Several members of one ancient Egyptian family, commonly a married couple and their children, could be buried in one such structure. When one of the family members attained a higher official status, he could afford to build his own tomb, usually located close to the tomb of his family, and have it decorated by an Egyptian artist. Such a tomb always indicated a relatively good position of its owner in the Egyptian administrative. Fetekti belonged to these relatively successful officials, who possessed an independent tomb. His high status is further indicated by his titles and functions connected with the royal weavers' workshops, which produced high quality textiles for the royal court. Finally, his burial chamber must also be mentioned in this context, since it lay 10 m below the surface and was the only one in the necropolis to be cased with limestone blocks.

After the termination of Lepsius' excavations, the precise location of the tomb was forgotten, and for a long time, nothing but its decoration was known. It was rediscovered first in 1991. In the course of the exploration of the tomb, a corridor chapel with more decoration painted over white plaster was discovered to the south of the large pillared court, which was excavated by Lepsius. The western wall of the corridor chapel contained two false doors, which indicate that the funerary cult of two persons was practised in this tomb. The southern door belonged to the tomb owner Fetekti, the northern one to the official named Meti, whose precise relationship to Fetekti remains a mystery. The mouths of two shafts, situated to the west of the chapel, led to the burial chambers of the two men. The main burial chamber contained the completely scattered burial of Fetekti and poor remains of his funerary equipment consisting of several sherds of pottery vessels. The anthropological analysis of the

skeletal remains showed that Fetekti died at the age of 30 - 40 years.

The archaeological excavation also showed that the painted decoration of the open court, as it was seen and recorded by Lepsius, does not exist any more. The publication of the tomb thus had to rely on information from the middle of the 19th century. This is true also for the scenes that show the ancient Egyptian market, which originally appeared in several registers of decoration on the southern and western sides of the pillar in the open court.

The ancient Egyptian markets were places where peasants, craftsmen and fishermen could meet and exchange the produce of their work. This makes the preserved scenes very important, since they illustrate the details of ancient Egyptian market exchange. Reading the horizontal registers of these scenes from top to bottom and from left to right, the first band of decoration on the southern side of the pillar is virtually lost. The second register shows, to the left, two men in white skirts. They are approaching the market; the first one, named Iunka, carries beads and sandals in his hands. He is turned to the seller on the right. The latter is sitting next to a basket of cakes, examines the beads and addresses Iunka thus: "Look, my cake is sweet!". Iunka, still holding the beads, answers: "Look, my sandals are firm!" We are faced here with a proceeding trade transaction: it is a typical bargaining scene, where one type of ware was exchanged for another.

In the lower register, the vendor is located to the right. It is a peasant with a basket of vegetables, from which we can see only heads of young onions. Two potential buyers are approaching him from the right, one of them is carrying a bag over his shoulder. Behind him, a man is carrying two types of fans. The first of the customers addresses the vendor: "Look at the beautiful adornement, your jewel! Look, your collar! Look, fans!" And the vendor answers: "Let me have a look and tell me your price."

(Fig. 18)
Fragment of a plaster with painted decoration, which mentions Fetekti as overseer of the weaveries. Originally, the entire tomb was decorated with coulourful paintings. To the far right, there was originally a representation of Fetekti himself, wearing a short white skirt reaching above his knees and holding a kherep sceptre in his hand.

The western face of the stone pillar is somewhat better preserved. The upper band of decoration shows two man in the middle, bargaining over the price of a cloth. This scene is unique in showing us a transaction concerning a cloth. The making and distribution of textiles in ancient Egypt was a royal monopoly and only two scenes showing a free selling or barter of textiles were preserved to us. And why does one of them come precisely from the tomb of Fetekti? The answer is that Fetekti was an overseer of the weavers' workshops, and thus he may have received cloth as part of his reward for well-done work, or, alternatively, he may have got hold of it by not exactly legal means.

The left part of the central register shows a seated man holding a stone vessel called *mesekhet*. He is approached by a woman who carries two small stone

vessels containing oil, and speaks thus to the man: "Indeed, this is a festive oil, so you may be satisfied." Further to the right we see a woman bargaining over the price of fish, offered to her by a seated vendor, who is simultaneously gutting one of his fish. The accompanying text is unfortunately too damaged to be reconstructed.

In the lower register to the left, we see another fish vendor, who shouts at the woman standing in front of him: "Look, this is the real price!" The woman called Minmeret reacts by turning to the local supervisor of the market, whose task was to maintain order and punish potential thieves. "Come here, supervisor (of the market), Ibi!" she calls, and continues: "Catch him!" Her words indicate that the vendor is trying to cheat her and the supervisor Ibi is her last recourse.

To the right, we see the overseer Ibi himself, approached by another man, perhaps with some appeal. Ibi calms him down by saying: "Look, I hold transgressions in my hand (i.e., under control)."

There are other sources that contribute to our knowledge of Fetekti's life. They come mostly from the tombs at the Saqqara necropolis and from the papyrus archive of the funerary temple of King Neferirkare in Abusir. Based on the dating and identical titles, several mentions of our Fetekti may be identified in these written sources. In the papyrus archives, Fetekti is mentioned twice, in both cases as a lower priest *hem netjer*, "servant of god" in ancient Egyptian), who took part at processions around the pyramid and took care of part of the temple inventory. In the tomb of the high official Ptahhotep II, Fetekti is twice depicted as bringing offerings to his superior. Finally, in the tomb of the two brothers, manicurists Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotpe, his presence is attested three times, sailing in a boat, dragging a boat on a rope, and riding a donkey.

All this evidence discovered outside the tomb of Fetekti testifies to the character of his work as a funerary priest. He took care of part of the inventory of the funerary temple of the deceased king, while he also maintained the funerary cult in the tombs of his better situated and earlier deceased contemporaries at Saqqara. This was not an unimportant job; Egyptian priests were an indispensable component of the so-called redistributional economy. They received their salary in kind (coming from the commodities symbolically offered on the altars of temples and tombs), and probably brought part of this salary to the market, where they could further exchange it for agricultural or handicraft products.

The case of Fetekti is a typical example of how far we can get in our endeavor at the reconstruction of the past, with enough sources at out disposal. Despite the 4300 years that divide us from the time of Fetekti, perhaps we know much more about this ancient Egyptian official than about our own ancestors who lived a hundred years ago.

Above:
(Fig. 19)
Detail of the
decoration, preseved in Lepsius' publication of the tomb of Fetekti, west (left) and south sides of the pillar from the court, with detailed
market scenes.

Below:
(Fig. 20)
Fetekti's burial lay at the bottom of a deep shaft and was the only one in the cemetery to have been cased with limestone blocks. The picture shows the sarcophagus and fragments of the lid, which originally sealed the sarcophagus of the deceased tomb owner.

The Unifished Story of Vizier Qar and his Sons

The life stories of the individual members of the family of vizier Qar represent the youngest stratum of Old Kingdom finds from south Abusir, and date to the Sixth Dynasty (23rd century B.C.). Their lives enfolded in the unstable period toward the end of the Old Kingdom, when the power of the provinces rapidly grew at the expense of the king, when the Egyptians were threatened from beyond the frontiers of their country, and when it was even possible to assassinate the Egyptian king.

The end of the era of the builders of the gigantic Old Kingdom pyramids belongs to the epigraphically relatively best documented periods of ancient Egyptian history. The origin of the founder of the 6th Dynasty, King Teti, is, however, almost completely unknown. His pyramid belongs to the dominant features of the Saqqara necropolis, and the majority of the highest dignitaries from the time of his reign are buried around it. The underground rooms of the pyramid were decorated with the so-called Pyramid Texts - collections of ancient magical and religious texts, the task of which was to secure the king's immortality after his death, his ascent to the sky and his identification with the highest deities of the ancient Egyptian pantheon. Teti's burial chamber contains a large stone sarcophagus, which once protected the body of the king.

In the beginning of his reign, Teti had to face numerous political problems, above all those connected with the rise of the power of the country's highest officials, who appropriated to themselves ever growing shares of the government of the country and of the administration of its wealth. Therefore, Teti married one of his daughters, Princess Watetkhethor, to the dignitary Mereruka, who held the office of vizier, and was thus the second most powerful man in the state after the king. However, it was also in the time of the reign of Teti that the tombs of some dignitaries serving at the king's court were intentionally destroyed. This indicates that he was very uncompromising in dealing with his opponents. Nonetheless, in the end he was, at least according to indirect and mediated reports, killed by his own bodyguards.

After Tetil's death, the next important king on the Egyptian throne was his son Pepi I, who built for himself a beautiful pyramid complex in south Saqqara, in an area still inaccessible for tourists. The name of the complex was Mennefer Pepi - "lasting is the beauty of Pepi." Later, this name began to be used for the Egyptian capital, and it has come down to contemporary times in the form Memphis.

Pepi I reigned for approximately 50 years and his funerary complex was surrounded by at least six smaller pyramid complexes, which contained the burials of the king's favourite wives. Pepi I also had to face the growing independence of officials, above all in the southern provinces of the country. Therefore, he married two daughters of Djau, a high official from the city of Abydos in Upper Egypt, whom he subsequently appointed to the office of vizier, i.e. one who de facto oversaw the administration of the entire country. This way Pepi I ensured the loyalty and support of a powerful and almost independent family of dignitaries from Abydos.

One of the last rulers of the Old Kingdom was Pepi II, who, maz have to some views, ruled for up to 94 years. At first, however, his mother Ankhnesmeryre II ruled as regent for him. His reign was marked with growing unrests in the south of the country, where, in consequence of the multiplying economical and political problems, the Egyptian army was no longer able to secure the Egyptian frontier. Pepi's boat builder Anakhet was killed at the Red Sea coast together with his entire expedition, at it was necessary to dispatch a special mission in order to bring their bodies back to Egypt.

The life story of vizier Qar and his family unfolded precisely in this unstable climate of the Sixth Dynasty. Their modern story began to be written in the autumn of the year 1995. At that time, seven years ago, only after a few days of work in deep sand, the Egyptian desert began to reveal one of its many secrets. A tomb complex of an unknown man gradually emerged in front of our eyes. A several meters high stone wall with partially preserved plaster was uncovered with roofing blocks in their original position, exactly as the ancient builders had placed them. A similar situation awaited us also in several other rooms of the tomb. In the course of further excavations, it became clear that this Qar was one of the many dignitaries at the king's court and that his functions included, among others, also that of a judge. All this information came to light with the discovery of his first cultic chapel. Its walls bore neither relief nor painted decoration, but the western wall contained a large, almost three meters tall false door made of a single huge limestone block, which was covered with inscriptions including the name and titles of the deceased, as well as offering formulae in his favour.

A long roofed corridor connected this room with another, second chapel. The ceiling of this chapel reached the height of almost four meters, and it was formed by large limestone blocks, which we had to remove in order to be able to work inside without being constantly threatened. Its walls were completely preserved, and the entire western wall was taken up by a false door. According to the inscriptions, the owner of this chapel was also a man named Qar. This Qar, however, was a vizier, i.e. the second highest man in the country after the king.

The entrance to this cultic room was decorated with representations of servants bringing sacrificial animals, gazelles and cattle. The walls of the chapel proper were almost completely covered with reliefs depicting long processions of offering bearers, priests and servants of the vizier, bringing burial equipment and offerings for the deceased. Butchers are also present and depicted at work, slaughtering and portioning the sacrificed cattle. The registers of decoration immediately below the ceiling of the chapel were reserved for the representaion of the individual collections of objects of burial equipment, above all food, stone and pottery vessels, furniture, various tools, etc. In the western part of the chapel vizier Qar was depicted twice, overseeing his servants with a dignified look. Immediately in front of Qar, we can see his sons, each one of them labeled with his name and most important title. Thus, we learn that their names were Inti, Qar, Senedjemib and Tjenti.

(Fig. 21)
A panoramic view documenting the state of exploration of the funerary complex of Qar in the year 2000. In the background, we can see the Step Pyramid of Djoser in Saqqara.

Father -Vizier Qar

Who, however, was Qar? Was he the same man to whom belonged the first, undecorated chapel? Or were these men two different individuals? The exploration of a long descending corridor, which was only a meter high and a meter wide, soon brought to light the answers to these questions. This corridor began in the area in front of the tomb of Qar and led to the burial chamber hidden deep underground, which contained a huge sarcophagus weighing several tonnes. The tomb, including the sarcophagus, was, however, looted, and nothing but a wooden comb remained from the burial equipment.

Since the tomb contained two chapels, but only one burial chamber, it became clear that it could only have had one owner. The situation may have been as follows. When official Qar had reached the age and position when further advancement in his career was no longer likely, he began to build his tomb. Towards the end of his career he was, however, unexpectedly appointed to the office of vizier. As such, a simple undecorated chapel was no longer sufficient for him, and Qar had to enlarge his tomb and build a new cultic place which would be appropriate to his high position. Qar probably owed his success to the situation at the court, where loyalty and devotion to the monarch were valued above all.

These facts suggested that the tomb was the final resting place of one of the highest ranking men in the Egyptian society, a hitherto unknown "prime minister" of the Sixth Dynasty. In the course of further excavations, several smaller tombs were discovered to the north of the complex of Qar. These tombs belonged to his sons. Interestingly enough, all of them were intentionally destroyed: with the exception of the foundations of the walls and a few blocks, the decoration of the individual chapels was broken into smaller and larger fragments, which were left to lie as they had fallen. Why did this happen? What could have led someone to come and exert an undoubtedly tremendous effort to destroy the tombs of several members of Qar's family, leaving the tomb of the vizier himself untouched? It appears that Qar probably sided with the right party, the power holders at the Egyptian court, while some of his sons may have unsuccessfully conspired against the king. Consequently, an order may have been issued to destroy the tombs of these sons, and thus also their afterlife existence.

Further excavations at this place in Abusir could continue first in the year 2000, in the area to the south of the complex of the vizier. Under the desert surface, we discovered a surprisingly well preserved complex of Qar's favourite son, judge Inti.

(Fig. 23)
The false door of Qar from the time before he was promoted to the rank of vizier. According to the titles preserved on this false door, he was only a judge, active in the king's legal court in the capital Memphis. Qar's name means "bag," and it may well have described his character.

(Fig. 24)
The false door from the second chapel of Qar, made after he had been appointed to the office of vizier. Through this door, the deceased entered the offering room in order to take part in the offering rituals in his honour. The texts on the door include his titles, as well as short phrases about the impeccable character of the vizier and his hope for a peaceful afterlife.

Far left:
(Fig. 22)
Qar seated in front of a table laden with offerings. The picture comes from the richly decorated second chapel, built after he had become vizier.

Son Judge Inti

At first, we uncovered the entrance to the mud brick tomb, which was preserved in its complete height of several meters and cased with quality limestone blocks. Both sides of entrance were decorated with two standing figures of official Inti, executed in fine relief, and a long hieroglyphic inscription containing his autobiography. There were also the figures of his two sons, Ankhemtjenenet and Senedjemib, members of the third generation of the family of vizier Qar. Originally, four obelisks stood in front of this decorated façade, as symbols of the son god Re, one of the most highly praised deities of the ancient Egyptian pantheon.

The entrance opened into a small court paved with large limestone blocks, which led into the cultic chapel. Once, priests would enter this chapel every day in order to cover the altar with offerings consisting of food, drinks and incense burnt on fire. The chapel was richly decorated, and its western wall contained a false door. The monolithic limestone stela was painted red in order to imitate a valuable building material - Assuan granite. The inscriptons that covered the false door included offering formulae and titles and name of the deceased. This enabled us to partially reconstruct the career of Inti, who was active as a priest, judge, and member of the law court in the royal palace. The decoration on the walls of his chapel was even more beautiful, finer and better executed than that of his father. We can see the figure of Inti faced by a procession of officials and priests. His wife Merut is kneeling at his feet, and under his chair stads a dwarf holding Inti's favourite dog Idjem on a leash. Inti is dressed in a white skirt and his chest is adorned with a wide, finely executed collar. His head is covered with a carefully curled wig. The face of Inti indicates that in terms of the quality of work, the tomb owner was very demanding. We know that the owners of ancient Egyptian tombs personally controlled the quality of the work of the builders and craftsmen responsible for the decoration of the monument. This is clear from the scenes from other contemporary tombs, which show the tomb owner carried by servants in a litter chair and controlling the progress of the construction works. The artist who modelled Inti's face had, as is still apparent today, to twice redo his eyebrows, before he managed to shape them into the correct form. Undoubtedly this was reflected in the height of his payment, which was at that time given in beer jars and bread cakes.

The greatest surprise, however, followed after a few weeks of dangerous works in the 22 m deep shaft situated close to the chapel of Inti, when we entered the burial chamber. Already in the course of the clearance of the shaft it became clear that the burial chamber was not looted after it had been sealed and its shaft filled - this was indicated by the fact that on various levels in the shafts, objects came to light that had ritually accompanied its filling. Among these were alabaster vessels, pottery, and an offering table. To the west of the shaft was the burial chamber itself. Along its western wall, there stood a huge, 3 meters long and 2 meters high limestone sarcophagus, inscribed with the name and titles of Inti. On the sarcophagus and around it, other parts of the burial equipment were found, such as pottery vessels, copper tools and miniature stone vessels. In front of the sarcophagus, at its eastern side, we found a false door stela, a unique find of extreme value for archaeologists speacialised in the time of the pyramid builders. It appears that the stela served as a symbolical gate for going in and out of the netherworld.

During the documantation of the tomb, however, it became clear that it had, after all, been robbed - it probably happened in the course of the burial

(Fig. 26)
The offering scene from the southern wall of the chapel of Inti. Inti is depicted together with his wife and favourite dog.

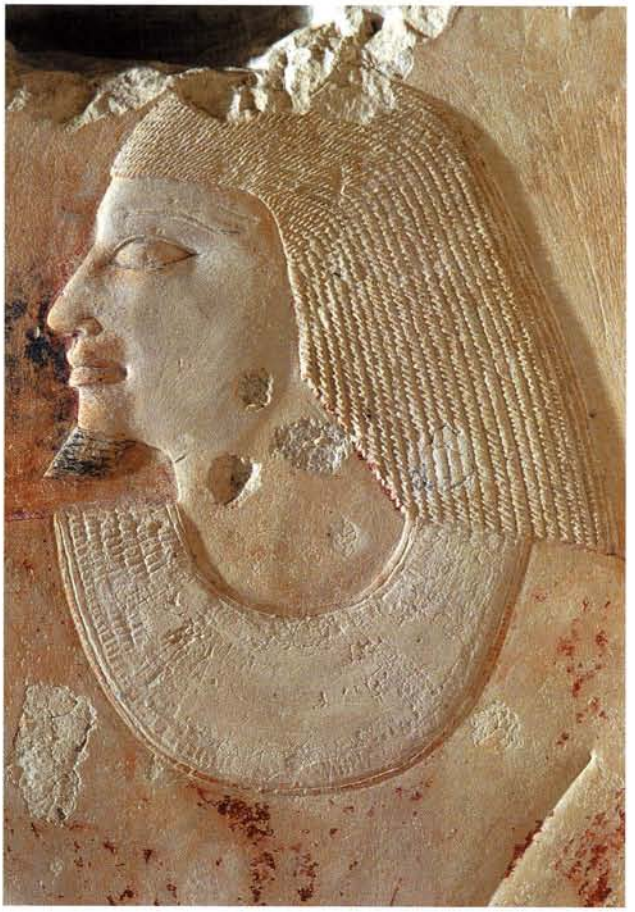
ceremonies. The ancient Egyptian workers, whose task it was to ensure Inti's burial, probably took use of a moment of the guards' negligence to break into the already sealed sarcophagus and robbed the mummy of the deceased of amulets and other items of personal use. Thus, Inti's bones were scattered around the entire room and were discovered even on the sarcophagus lid, together with numerous miniature alabaster vessels. This must have happened between the burial itself and the filling of the access shaft. On the basis of modern parallels, we may estimate that five adult men may have needed several days for the filling of such a shaft.

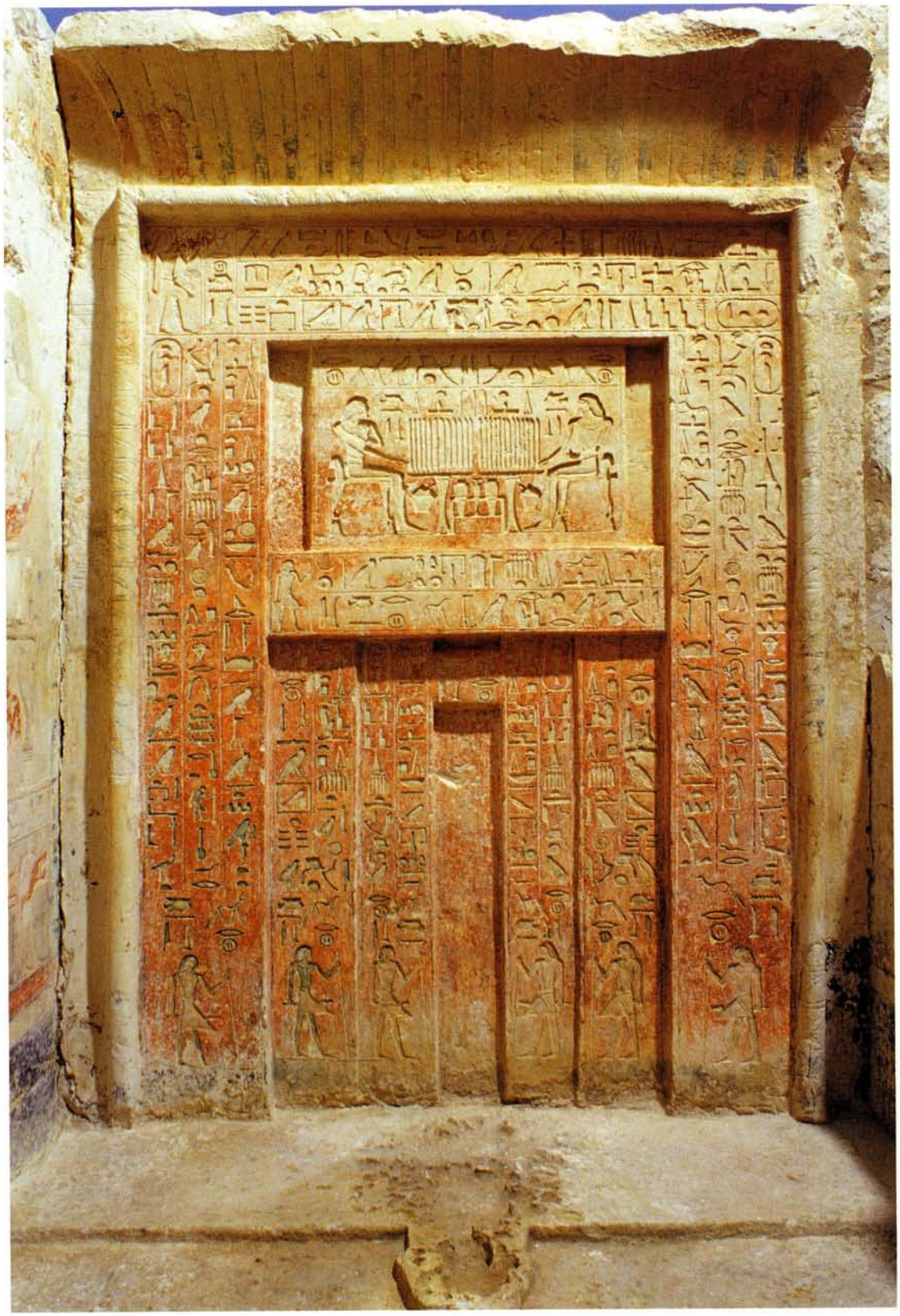
Above Left:
(Fig. 26)
The reconstructed and cleaned façade of the tomb of Inti. There are two representations of Inti. On each side, one of his sons brings him offerings. Both are labeled as the oldest, and it is therefore possible that Inti had two wives. The hieroglyphic inscriptions include an idealized biography.

Below Left:
(Fig. 27)
The statue of a scribe named Nefer, wich was found in the entrance area of Inti's tomb

Above:
(Fig. 28)
Detail of the face of judge Inti. Even today, we wonder at the fineness of the representation of the judge's curled wig and collar, and the delicate features of the face.

Below:
(Fig. 29)
The works in the burial chamber of Inti lasted several days in the course of which we found remains of burial equipment and documented a huge limestone sarcophagus with an offering stela. The picture shows reis Ahmed el-Kereti with his workers. Note Inti's skeletal remains, which the reis collects in a basket.





(Fig.30)
The false door of judge Inti. The tomb owner is represented two times, seated behind an offering table with stylised reed leaves, which symbolised the Egyptian Delta, the land of rebirth, where also the Egyptian god of the netherworld Osiris was resurrected.

Above:
(Fig. 31)
Inti's burial chamber was cut into the bedrock at the bottom of a 22 m deep shaft. In the foreground we can see a stone stela, through which the deceased would exit the sarcophagus, which stands behind it.

Below:
(Fig. 32)
Fragment of the decoration of the tomb of official Meriherishef. The tomb was destroyed and its decoration was reused in Inti's complex as waste material; the original location of the tomb of Meriherishef remains a mystery.

Son Qar Junior

In the same year, the tomb of the oldest son of Qar, Qar junior, was also found. His burial chamber was hidden 16 m below the desert surface, and it was accessed by a short corridor leading from the bottom of the shaft. Its content surprised us in many respects. In the southeastern corner of the chamber, covering several square meters, large two-handled amphorae with flat bottoms were found. Gradually, it became clear that they were exact copies of imported wine amphorae. In the real amphorae of this type, high quality wine was imported to Egypt from one of the ports of Syria-Palestine. This demanded and highly valued commodity was imported precisely from the area of today's Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Palestine, and it was destined for the royal court and the highest officials of the country. But why did Qar possess only copies? Probably, this was the cheaper way. Moreover, in the Egyptian conception of the afterlife, the copy was functionally equivalent to the original.

The opposite corner was filled with hundreds of small copper tools, which, were also part of the burial equipment of the deceased for the use in the other world. Next to them, bones from the meat of the cattle sacrificed for the deceased were found. Futher west, on the floor of the burial chamber, we discovered numerous stone vessels and tools, some of which were destined for the symbolical ceremony of the "opening of the mouth," which was performed in the course of the burial rites in order to revive the mummy of the deceased for the eternal life in the other world. Along the western wall of the burial chamber, a pit was cut into the bedrock. This pit received the burial and afterwards, it was covered with large limestone blocks. Just like in the case of Inti, the burial was robbed and scattered.

The texts on the stoppers of the wine amphorae contained information of utmost importance - the preserved inscriptions included the name and titles of vizier Qar, who was thus probably responsible for the burial and burial equipment of his son.

Below left:
(Fig. 33)
A set of offering tools including miniature stone vessels, but lacking the knives called pesheskef. These tools were employed to bring the mummy back to life, now in the netherworld. The find comes from the underground of the tomb of Qar junior.

Above right:
(Fig. 34)
The still sealed vesels imitating wine amphorae from Syria-Palestine, which in ancient Egypt belonged to luxury commodities. The burial chamber of Qar junior.

Below right:
(Fig. 35)
Detail of the sealing of one of the jars with the imprints of a cylinder seal of vizier Qar, who took care of the burial of his untimely deceased son.

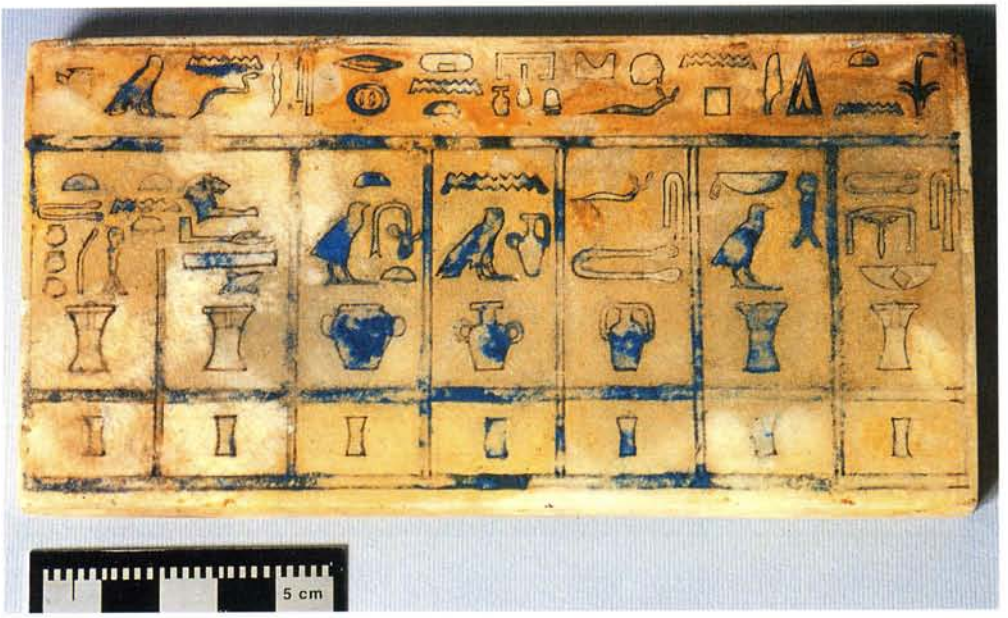
Son Senedjemib

The last step forward in the exploration of the family of vizier Qar was made in 2001, when another, 16 m deep shaft was found. To the south of its bottom, a burial chamber was discovered, containing a huge stone sarcophagus with the mummy of the third son of Qar, Senedjemib. He, however, did not lie alone in his sarcophagus, his wife lay next to him. Besides the bodies themselves, we found also items of burial equipment, including several alabaster vessels, other stone vessels, copper tools, stone headrests and a beautifully preserved tablet of seven sacred oils. At the head of the sarcophagus, several pottery jars were found, which were filled with Nile mud. This was connected with the idea of resurrection and afterlife, since it was precisely the black Nile mud, from which life was born and crops grew after the annual floods in the Nile Valley.

Despite all the discoveries and new pieces of information, the substructure of the tombs of the Qar family had not yet revealed all its secrets. The forthcoming autumn expedition will be dedicated to the seeking of the tomb and burial chamber of the last of the sons on the vizier Qar, Tjenti. And who knows what new important discoveries will be made that might lead to the understanding of this family and time when they lived.

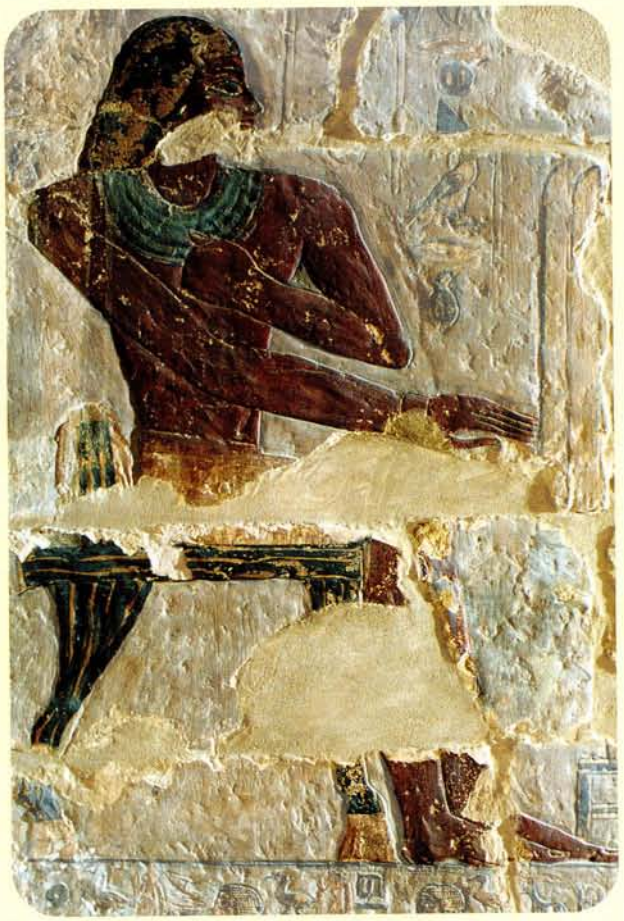
(Fig. 36)
View of the burial chamber of the third son of Qar, Senedjemib. Another interesting find was made here, namely of a collection of fifteen vessels filled with black Nile earth, which probably symbolised resurrection.

(Fig. 37)
A view of the burial chamber of Senedjemib, looking toward the entrance shaft. In the foreground is the hole through which robbers entered the sarcophagus.



(Fig. 38)
The tablet of seven sacred oils, which were used to anoint the body of the deceased in the course of burial rituals. The text in the upper part includes an appeal for offerings from the king and Anubis, a jackal deity and guardian of the ancient Egyptian necropoleis.

Father Qar & his sons



QAR

INTI

QAR jr.

SENEDJEMIB

TJENTI

Son Inti & his family

INTI

ANKHEMTJENENET

SENEDJEMIB

Inti's wife MERUT

The History of the Exploration of the Site of Abusir

The first reference to Abusir comes from the ancient author Diodorus Siculus. In the first volume of his *Bibliothéka*, he mentions a settlement, a village located in the vicinity of the Serapeum (the cemetery of the sacred Apis bulls). Further allusions to Abusir can be found in the works of the Arab historians 'Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi (13th century) and al-Idrisi. Their descriptions, however, probably concern a greater part of the entire Saqqara necropolis.

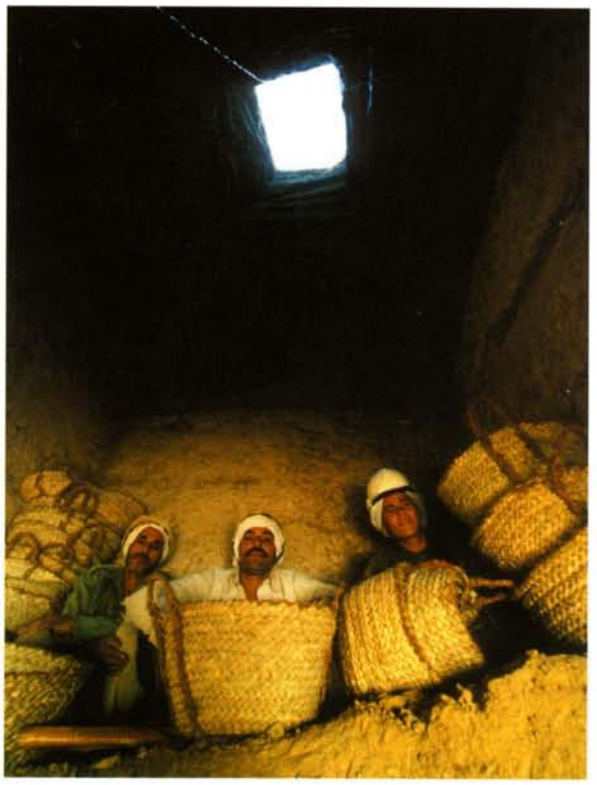
In modern times, the area was first explored by John S. Perring (1813-1869), who penetrated the inner rooms of the Abusir pyramids. The expedition of the German Egyptologist Karl Richard Lepsius (1810-1884) came in his wake in 1842-43. Lepsius was the first one to scholarly explore the pyramid fields of the whole Memphite area. He also labeled the pyramids with numbers, which are still in use. In south Abusir, he explored part of the tomb belonging to the Fifth Dynasty official Fetekti. In 1893, Jacques J. M. de Morgan (1857-1824) worked in the chapels and open court of the famous mastaba of Ptahshepses. He was also the author of one of the first maps of the Abusir necropolis, which was published in the early 1820's. In the 1890's, the seb-bakhin discovered the so-called first Abusir papyrus archive in the area of the funerary temple of Neferirkare. This archive was later published by Jean de Cenival and Mme Posener-Kriéger (1925-1996).

The year 1900 witnessed the initiation of the archaeological excavations of the German Oriental Society, which focused on the Abusir pyramids and their temples. The first pyramid complex to be explored was that of Neferirkare (1900-1902), then, in the years 1903-1907, the complex of King Niuserre and the non-royal cemetery to the northeast of his pyramid were explored, and finally, between 1907-1908, the pyramid complex of Sahure. The works were directed by Ludwig Borchardt (1863-1968).

Already before the completion of the works in the pyramid complex of Sahure, Borchardt published an approximate reconstruction of the appearance of the Abusir royal necropolis. Nevertheless, it contained several errors that were above all the consequence of the incomplete exploration of the individual archaeological objects. Two smaller archaeological excavations were carried out in the area of south Abusir between 1945-1960. The first went on between 1945-46 and was directed by the Egyptian archaeologist Zaki Nur. He found a number of limestone offering altars and basins inscribed with the names of their owners. Sometimes in the 1950's and 1960's, the German scholar Ludwig Keimer (1893-1957) purportedly explored an unidentified part of the necropolis. The unpublished finds from his excavation are now stored in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo.

In the beginning of the 1960's, Abusir was visited by the Italian architects Celeste Rinaldi (1902-1977) and Vitto Maragioglio (1915-1976), who studied the royal pyramid complexes in great detail. They were also the last persons to visit the substructures of the Abusir pyramids.

In the year 1960, the Czech (then Czechoslovak) expedition began to work in Abusir, at first under the direction of Zbyněk Žába 1917-1971), after his death by František Váhala (1911-1974), and since the year 1976 (until now) by Miroslav Verner. In the year 1971, the basic exploration of the mastaba of Ptahshepses was concuded, and after a forced break due to the political situation in Czechoslovakia, the exploration of the pyramid complex of Queen Khentkaus II and of the tomb of Princess Khamerernebti was initiated in the year 1976. The exploration of the pyramid complex



Above:
(Fig. 42)
Traditional methods are applied even in modern archeological excavations

Below left:
(Fig. 43)
Abusir workmen at rest at the bottom of the shaft of Inti

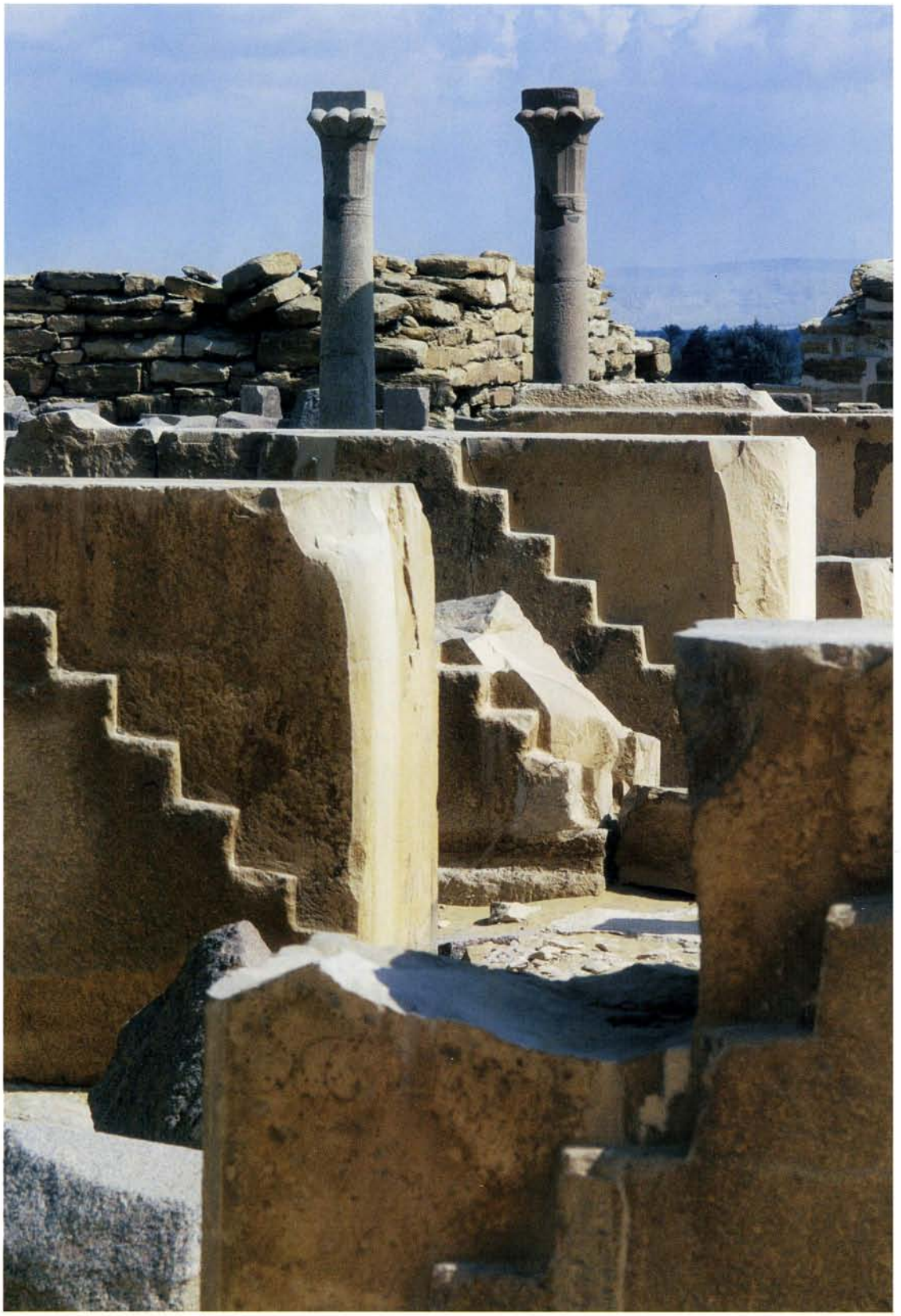
Below right:
(Fig. 44)
Professor Verner and reis Ahmed in the burial chamber of Qar junior

of Neferefre began in the early 1980's and was not finished before 1998. The works in this complex initially concentrated on the pyramid temple, which was built in several stages. Finally, in the late 1990's, the pyramid itself was explored, including the burial chamber, where remains of the burial equipment were found, as well as even some fragments of the royal mummy. Currently, two pyramids of the female members of the royal family are being explored.

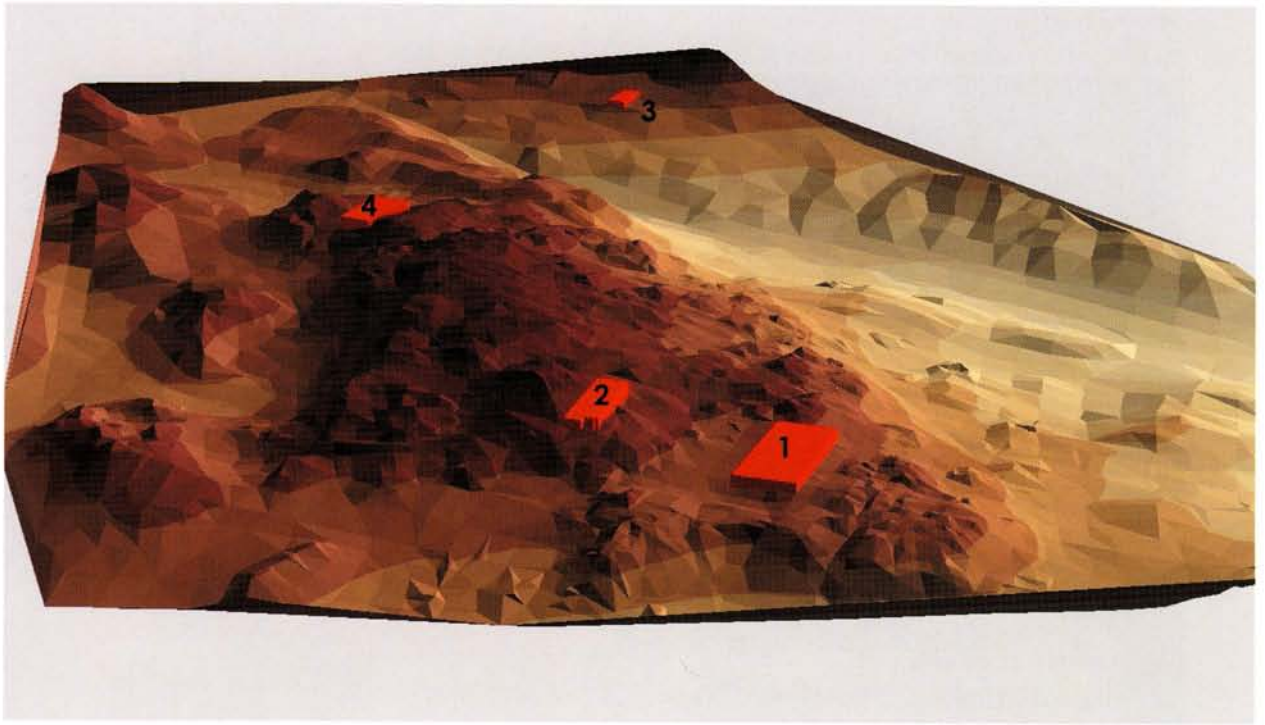
In 1991, a multidisciplinary project was initiated, focusing on the exploration of the southern part of the Abusir necropolis, to the area of the so-called South Abusir, which is now the center of archaeological research. The tombs located here span virtually the entire period of the Old Kingdom. One of the oldest decorated tombs at the necropolis was found here, as well a number of Fifth Dynasty tombs, and above all the extensive tomb complex of the hitherto unknown vizier Qar and the members of his family from the middle of the Sixth Dynasty.

However, there are not just pyramids and Old Kingdom tombs in Abusir. Besides them, large cemeteries from the First Intermediate Period (2134-1991) and from the Late Period (712-332 B.C.) are attested here. Since the 1980's, the Czech mission gradually excavated two shaft tombs from the 6th and 5th centuries B.C. - the tomb of the dignitary Udjahorresnet and later, in the 1990's, the intact tomb of the priest Iufaa, the exploration of which still continues.

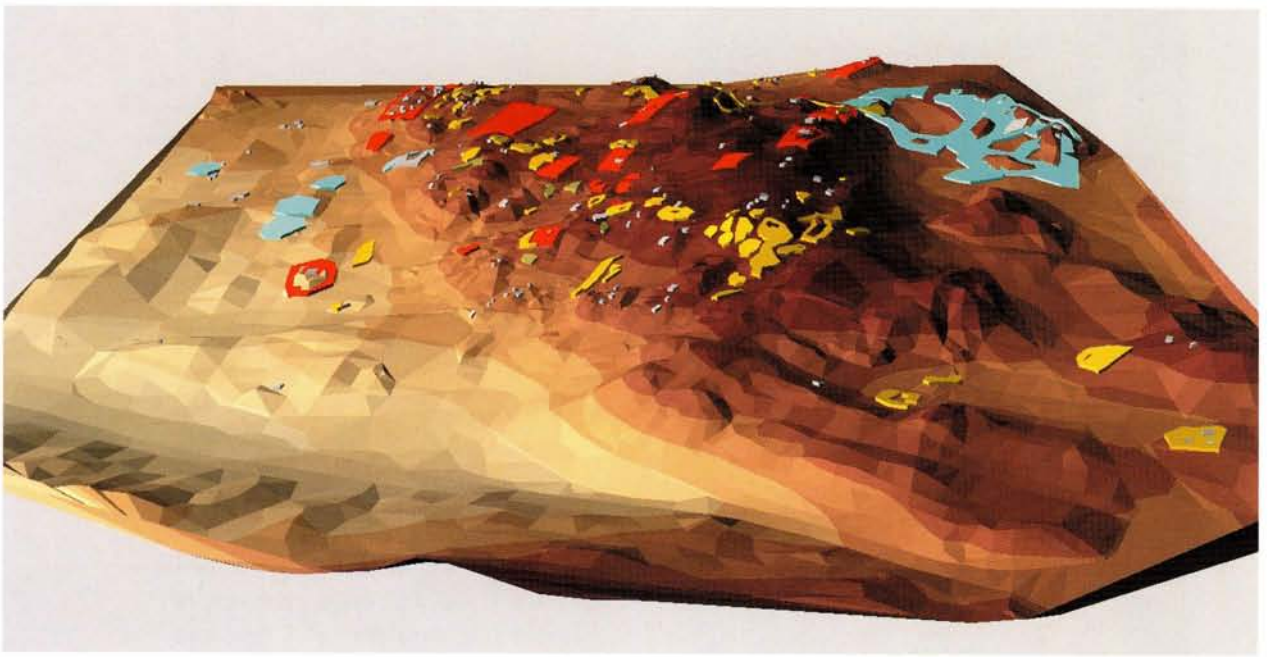
Just like in the past, even now every new expedition in Abusir begins only in the moment when on the first morning of the excavations, the leader of the Abusir workers (for a whole decade, the foreman of the Czech mission has been reis Talal el-Kereti) calls out "In the name of God the merciful and compassionate" and the hoes of the workers cut into the sand of the Egyptian desert. In these moments none of us knows what awaits us on the various remote sites of the Egyptian desert. As if these places were forgotten not only by human memory, but by time itself, which otherwise performs its art of destruction with unfailing precision. Let us hope that this call shall accompany the Czech excavations in the future and that it shall, as it always has, promise important discoveries.



(Fig. 45)
The remains of magazines in the funerary temple of Sahure. Traces of the original staircases were preserved in these magazines.



(Fig. 46)
View of South Abusir from the southeast with the tombs of Hetepi (1), Kaaper (2), Fetekti (3], and the complex of Qar (4).



(Fig.. 47)
View of South Abusir from the northeast with the individual groups of monuments, as they were noted during surface survey

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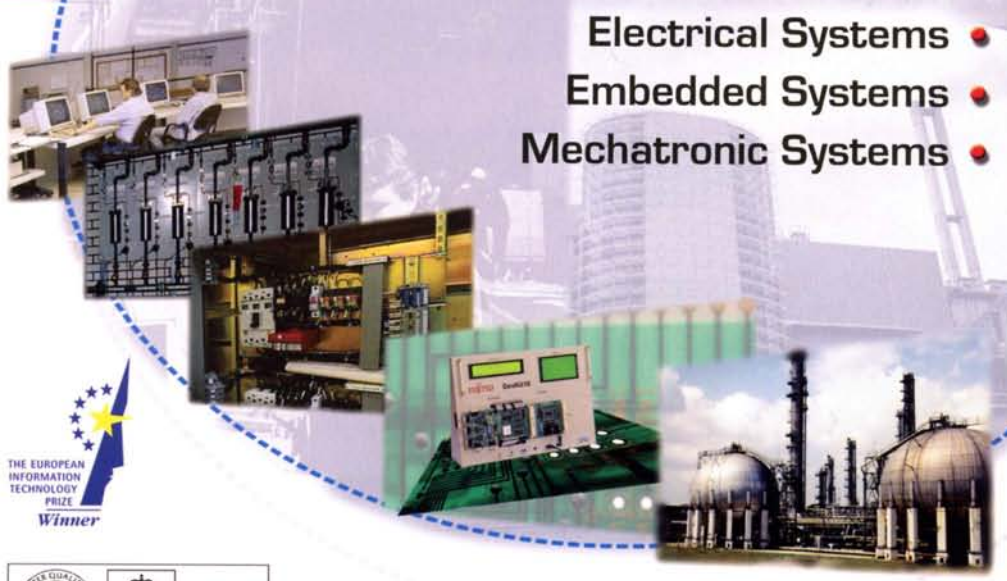

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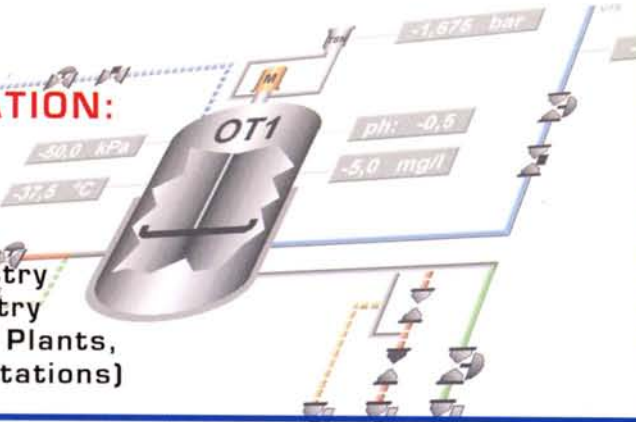

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http://www.oldkingdomarchaeology.com

- pages dedicated to the archaeology of the Old Kingdom period;

http://www.ff.cuni.cz/~krejci

- the official pages of the Czech Institute of Egyptology, Faculty of Arts, Charles University;

http://egypt.cuni.cz/index.htm

- the official pages of the Czech National Centre for Egyptology;

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